RELIGIOUS *MANGA* CULTURE
THE CONFLATION OF RELIGION AND ENTERTAINMENT IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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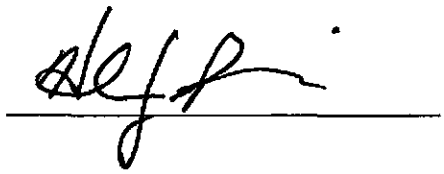

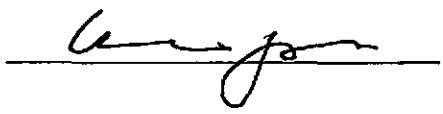

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ABSTRACT

This thesis utilizes the popular fictional entertainment media of *manga* (illustrated serial novels) and *anime* (animated films that are often based upon *manga*) as a means of apprehending: 1) contemporary Japanese attitudes towards religion; 2) the role of religion in contemporary Japanese society; and 3) the various ways that the production and consumption of fictional entertainment simultaneously serve as the production and consumption of religious thought. Fiction—especially fiction augmented with illustration—and religion share imaginative qualities and the need for an audience, and both utilize the former (and each other) in their pursuit and retention of the latter. Through an examination of how religion uses fiction and vice versa, the thesis describes how both imagine and reconstruct reality within *manga* and *anime* culture, and how the verisimilitude of these religious and fictive imagined worlds helps to create temporary or lasting perceptions of reality—and associated convictions and practices—among audiences.

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CONVENTIONS

Japanese names will be given in traditional Japanese order, family name first, with the exception of Japanese people writing in English. Citations of Japanese authors' names use small capitals only in the initial citation, all other authors are normally cited. I have retained diacritical marks on all Japanese terms, except for the most common of place names (e.g., Tokyo) or other words that can be found in most English language dictionaries. Because *manga* and *anime* are still not fully a part of the popular lexicon, I have kept them italicized except when citing authors who do not italicize them. Japanese terms and names are given with the *kanji* in their first instance in each chapter. In referring to historical time periods, for broad periods such as Heian or Edo, I have used the word "period"; for imperial reign dates I have used the term "era." Citations of *manga* are from paperback or hardback condensed volumes rather than from weekly or monthly magazines. To the best of my knowledge, all images and figures are fair use. All Japanese translations are my own unless otherwise noted in the bibliography or citations, and I accept full responsibility for any mistakes in translation or transliteration, as well as for any factual errors or errors of omission.

PREFACE: RELIGIOUS *MANGA* CULTURE

THE CONFLATION OF RELIGION AND ENTERTAINMENT IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

The fictive qualities common to religion and the popular Japanese entertainment media of *manga* (illustrated serial novels, マンガ) and *anime* アニメ (animated films that are often based upon *manga*) demonstrate that the seemingly self-evident division of religion and entertainment is spurious. Nominally or apparently secular media have contributed to the development and spread of new or altered types of religious practices and beliefs throughout Japanese religious history, and this study accordingly argues that we can apprehend protean and plastic Japanese attitudes towards religion, religiosity, and ritual practice through the *manga* medium.

To suggest that religion is fictive is not to suggest that it is false. Like fiction, religion is characterized by the exercise of the imagination, and both fiction and religion involve the willing (if sometimes temporary) suspension of disbelief. The singular, comprehensive noun "religion" here refers to a continuum of concepts and practices predicated upon descriptions of an imagined veridicality that is inexplicable by empirical methods alone. For the purposes of this work, this continuum encompasses the plurality of "religions" as well as of attitudes towards the supernatural, the irrational, or the transcendent that may not be found within the teachings or practices of any specific religious tradition. The attitudes and concepts collectively deemed "religion" [*shûkyô* 宗教] in Japan—and therefore in these pages—may not be perfectly synonymous with non-Japanese definitions of the word; perceptions of religion as primarily focused on doctrine and allegiance generally do not apply historically or phenomenologically to Japanese

religious practice.[1] Here religion [*shûkyô*] is dynamic rather than static, and is not defined primarily by professions of affiliation or belief, but rather by ritual practice and participation in belief through narrative.[2]

Participation in the production and consumption of religious thought thus does not necessitate or imply allegiance to a particular ritual or doctrinal lineage, nor is it predicated upon adherence to the prescriptions of doctrine and orthodoxy of specific religious traditions. Contributions to the religious continuum in the forms of narrative, praxis, or ideation necessarily influence conceptions of religion in general; they can affect—and can sometimes create—specific religions. The emergence of specific religions occurs with the articulation of the religious continuum into relatively formalized thought or practices, including—but not limited to—doctrine (religious notions becoming reified), canonization (specific texts becoming revered), orthodoxy in exegesis (interpretations of texts becoming codified), ritual practice (actions based upon religious concepts becoming systematized), and the creation of some sort of virtual or actual community. This work traces the influence and role of religion in the culture of *manga* and *anime* and vice versa, and examines the emergence of religions from within that culture.

For the purposes of this work, I refer to the religion in and of *manga* and *anime* as "religious *manga* culture." Although some producers and consumers of *manga* and *anime* might have reservations about the use of the word "religion" in conjunction with these products, I maintain that it is an accurate descriptor of much of the emotional, intellectual, and amusing elements found in *manga* culture as a whole. Similarly, although some religious institutions or religious individuals may have reservations about

modifying the phrase "*manga* culture" with the adjective "religious," I argue that the usage of religious themes by producers of these products and the canonization of some of these works by audiences suggests that "religious" is an adequate and appropriate descriptive word for describing the processes of imagination, production, and consumption that characterize much of that culture.

By "religious *manga* and *anime*," I mean those *manga* and *anime* that: 1) clearly draw upon religious themes or narrative structures similar to religious or sacred stories; and/or 2) otherwise utilize religious vocabulary or imagery for aesthetic or didactic purposes; and/or 3) serve as sources of religious inspiration or as guides for "ways of living" (*ikikata* 生き方) for individuals; and/or 4) act as scripture, ritual models, or liturgical sources for certain groups of fans or adherents to a specific religion. Religious *manga* and *anime* serve as sources of information about religions; they also serve as sites for religious thought and practice, and as gateways into the creation of new types of religious thought, new ritual practices, and even the formation of new religions.

Along with other media, *manga* culture now serves as a primary source of information about religion for many people—perhaps young people in particular—in contemporary Japan. Along with other media, *manga* culture plays an increasingly important role as one "expedient means" utilized by religious institutions to disseminate information about themselves to people of all ages. Like other types of literature and drama past and present, *manga* culture utilizes the existing religious tradition in the service of making exciting, inspiring, and entertaining narratives for audiences.

PURPOSE, SIGNIFICANCE, AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to determine what role religion plays in the popular genres of *manga* and *anime* in contemporary Japan and vice versa, and how these genres may be affecting Japanese conceptions of religion, spirituality, and belief, as well as related ritual and leisure practices. The study combines textual analysis and ethnographic research, examining: 1) ways religious themes are deployed in *manga* and *anime*; 2) ways these genres are used by religious institutions and individuals, or ways that they are used in a religious fashion by private individuals; 3) ways that audience members and producers of *manga* and *anime* perceive the role of religion in them; 4) ways that attitudes towards religion and spirituality are being presented and influenced through *manga* and *anime* culture; and 5) ways that *manga* and *anime* not only include, but also become, religion.

The study argues that although Japanese people on the whole tend to have negative or ambivalent attitudes towards "religion" in general,[3] popular culture products such as *manga* and *anime* can promote positive or lasting changes in attitudes to religion while simultaneously providing outlets for entertainment and sources of religious information and inspiration. Placing the rise of religious *manga* and *anime* in the context of contemporary Japanese religious history, the project creates a methodological basis for looking at religion and fictional entertainment as conflated, rather than distinct, entities. In other words, this study argues against the pervasive perception of religion and fictional entertainment as discrete categories.

This study is significant because very few people have written on the connections between *manga* culture and religion in either Japanese or English. A number of studies

do exist on *manga* or *anime* in general, but these have tended to refer to religion only obliquely, often without careful definition of what "religion" actually means within *manga* culture;[4] these also have a tendency to use references to religion in the service of what I call "*manga*pology," or attempts to justify *manga* and *anime* as worthwhile forms of literature.[5] Similarly, a number of scholars of religion have referred to *manga* and *anime* obliquely in studies of contemporary Japanese religion,[6] but to my knowledge there has yet to be a book-length manuscript on the subject in Japanese or in English.[7]

Also, I have often spoken with scholars in the field who have experienced frustration at the lack of good sources on *manga* and *anime* and religion, since many students entering universities now have already been exposed to information about Japanese religions through these media. The present work is therefore designed as a research piece for scholars and general readers interested in Japanese religion and media, and portions of it may be used as references or as pedagogical tools for scholars interested in using these media to teach about Japanese religions in their classrooms (or possibly in counteracting misconceptions engendered through student exposure to *manga* culture).

Additionally, extant studies that have focused on religion and *manga* culture have rarely included the perspectives of audience members or producers of the work, focusing almost entirely on textual analysis.[8] While textual analysis is an important part of apprehending the intersections between religion and entertainment that many *manga* and *anime* present, ignoring or overlooking the highly important elements of producer and consumer attitudes towards religion and spirituality is an egregious oversight that obfuscates the complex nature of this largely unexplored field. This study attempts to

rectify this oversight through a series of interviews and surveys that, combined with textual analysis, historical background, and a strong theoretical framework, will bring greater coherence to the emerging field of studies in religious *manga* culture.

Methodologically, therefore, this project combines emic and etic perspectives on the culture of religious information that infuses much of *manga* and *anime*. Tracing the historical and social trends that have led to the rise of religious *manga* culture necessarily involves a somewhat functionalist approach to the roles that popular media and religious thought play in contemporary Japanese society; the project examines the sociological trends of urbanization, globalization, and the rise of the information age as crucial elements in the rise of Japanese secularism, religious relativism, and the advent of the media-centric spirituality movements that have preceded and accompanied the rise of religious *manga* culture. Yet solely examining the historical and material functions played by these social elements overlooks the very important factor of how individual participants perceive their religiosity, their spirituality, their production and/or consumption of *manga/anime*, or their secularism. The ethnographic element of this study is designed to address this problem, with interviews conducted with producers of religious *manga*, and surveys and interviews of young adult consumers (ages twenty to forty) of *manga/anime* who may have been influenced by religious *manga* culture. Portions of the work utilize the more anonymous but also informative realm of Internet message boards, fan sites, and blog communities to capture audience reactions to religious popular culture. Aware of the fact that my own interpretations will undoubtedly color my analysis of the works in question, I have chosen to occasionally insert myself into the text—personal anecdotes of my casual conversations with Japanese friends and

acquaintances add an informal ethnographic component to the formal interviews and surveys.

Through an appraisal of how religion uses and is used by *manga* culture and vice versa, this study points to larger questions related to the production and consumption of religious information and to the visionary and imaginative elements of religion and fiction. Religion necessarily imagines, creates, and reconstructs reality. Fiction does the same. Examining each through the other and both through *manga* culture, we can come to a greater understanding of how the verisimilitude of religious and fictive imagined worlds helps to create temporary or lasting perceptions of reality—and associated convictions and practices—among audiences.

NOTES

[1] Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr. *Practically Religious* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 4—8.

[2] Some scholars make the argument that we should avoid the use of "religion" altogether for non-Euroamerican cultures. I disagree, contending that until a better term is devised, "religion," for all of its problems, should suffice. I particularly take issue with stances that would reduce religion to "culture," a signifier that is so egregiously overused that it has lost most of its utility.

[3] There is extensive documentation of this attitude. See, for example, Jan Swyngedouw, "Religion in Contemporary Japanese Society," in Mark R. Mullins, SHIMAZONO Susumu, and Paul L. Swanson, eds. *Religion and Society in Modern Japan* (Fremont, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press [Jain Publishing Company], 1993), 67–70; YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô" 現代日本の宗教 [Contemporary Japanese Religion], in INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, ed. *Gendai nihon no shûkyô shakaigaku* 現代日本の宗教社会学 [*Sociology of Religion in Contemporary Japan*], (Tokyo: Sekaishisô Press, 1994), 94—130; Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), pp. 13-15; and ÔTANI Eiichi 大谷栄一, "Supirichuariti kenkyû no saizensen: nijûseiki no shûkyô kenkyû kara nijûisseiki no atarashii shûkyô kenkyû e" スピリチュアリティ研究の最前線—二十世紀の宗教研究から二十一世紀の新しい宗教研究へ [The Forefront of Spirituality Research: From Twentieth Century Research on Religion to the New Research on Religion of the Twenty-First Century], in ITÔ Masayuki 伊藤雅之, KASHIO Naoki 樫尾直樹, and YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, eds. *Supirichuariti no shakaigaku: gendai sekai no shûkyôsei no tankyû* スピリチュアリティの社会学—現代世界の宗教性の探究 [*The Sociology of Spirituality: The Search for Religiosity in the Contemporary World*] (Tokyo: Sekaishisô Press, 2004), 3—19.

[4] Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki, Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999); Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Frenchy Lunning, ed. *Mechademia* vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996). One questionably executed exception is Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? and Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), and the recent edited volume by Mark MacWilliams includes some others. Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

[5] See, for one example, Rajyashree Pandey, "Medieval Genealogies of Manga and Anime Horror," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008). The urge to trace contemporary *manga* and *anime* back to premodern roots is not inherently misguided, but should only be undertaken with full awareness of the pitfalls in ascribing a singular monolithic tradition to genres that so obviously derive from a variety of domestic and international sources. See Jaqueline Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, Historicity," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), esp. 305—309.

[6] Examples abound. SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進, *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004), 23; INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô: ushinawareta zahyôjiku* 若者と現代宗教—失われた座標軸 [*Young People and Contemporary Religion: The Lost Coordinate Axis*] (Chikuma Shinsho, 1999), 93; Ian Reader and George Tanabe, *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 30.

[7] Essays in the very recently published book, *Japanese Visual Culture*, attempt to deal with issues of religion and *manga/anime*, but they tend to reproduce some of the mistakes (e.g. overgeneralization) common to extant work on the subject. See MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture*, especially the articles by Gardner, Pandey, Yamanaka, and Yoshioka.

[8] Mark Wheeler MacWilliams, for example, writes on Tezuka Osamu's 手塚治虫 works *Budda* 『ブッダ』 and *Hi no tori* 『火の鳥』. See Mark Wheeler MacWilliams, "Japanese Comic Books and Religion: Osamu Tezuka's Story of the Buddha," in *Japan Pop!* Timothy J. Craig, ed. (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 109—137; and "Revisioning Japanese Religiosity: Osamu Tezuka's *Hi no tori* (The Phoenix)," in *Global Goes Local*, Timothy J. Craig and Richard King, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 177—210. Even Yamanaka Hiroshi's fairly comprehensive—if dated—article fails to make significant mention of how audiences might be consuming religious *manga*. See YAMANAKA Hiroshi 山中弘, "*Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô*" マンガ文化の中の宗教 [Religion in *Manga* Culture], in SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 and ISHII Kenji 石井研士, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される<宗教> [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996).

CHAPTER 1. ORIENTATIONS

THE HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GENRE OF RELIGIOUS *MANGA*

Although we should not be surprised to find religion within popular culture media such as *manga*, prevailing assumptions about the nature and definition of "religion" sometimes lead people to dismiss popular culture media as "merely entertainment" without any lasting moral, ethical, or religious value. Yet religious information is often disseminated through popular culture media, and popular culture media often deploy religious themes for aesthetic purposes in the service of leisure or pecuniary pursuits.

"Popular culture" here refers to products, practices, and discourse (particularly entertainment for the purposes of this study) that are designed for the taste and enjoyment of non-specialists (non-religious specialists in this case). Both popular culture and religion require audiences, imagined or real, for their dissemination. Both have historically made use of one another in order to gain those same audiences. Popular fictional media—represented by *manga* and *anime* here—thus not only include, but also become, religious information and practice.

PRECURSORS TO CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS *MANGA* AND *ANIME*

The purpose of the first part of this chapter is to place the contemporary genre of religious *manga* and *anime* in its historical context by looking at the ways combinations of image and text (or images and scripted performance) have interacted in religious contexts in Japan's history. The chapter surveys the history of vernacular fiction in Japan—and particularly vernacular fiction that uses a combination of image and script—in order to trace the connections that exist between religion and stories designed to inspire, entertain, and instruct. Premodern forms of art with didactic elements such as

emaki 絵巻 [picture scrolls], popular pedagogical literature and drama such as *setsuwa* 説話 [parabolic sermons] and *sekkyôbushi* 説教節 [sermon-ballads], and modern forms of entertainment such as *kamishibai* 紙芝居 [illustrated paper plays/picture card plays] have all contributed to the development and spread of religious ideas and practice.

Combinations of Image and Text or Image and a Script

Popular familiarity with religious concepts comes only in part from formal instruction on the content of religious texts or specific religious doctrine. Vernacular fiction has played a major role in the dissemination of religious thought and practice by utilizing relatively simple styles of writing or speech (often—significantly—combined with pictures) to relate stories that directly or indirectly transmit religious teachings. These stories may contribute to the moral edification or salvation of the audience, but they also have the praiseworthy quality of being simultaneously entertaining. Vernacular fiction often plays a major role in the development or spread of religious thought and practice by introducing audiences to new religions, by promoting faith in particular deities (including fictional ones),[1] and by contributing to the spread of particular ritual practices. The incorporation of religious themes in modern *manga* and *anime*, whether for aesthetic or didactic purposes, reflects a long history of visual-verbal approaches to religiosity through vernacular fiction in Japan.[2]

For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to the written component of some of the media being discussed as "text," and the oral performance of monologue or dialogue as "script." The emotive efficacy of text and script is magnified through image; the persuasive efficacy of images is augmented with text and script. As we will see, this

visual-verbal complementariness is common throughout the history of Japanese religious fiction in the vernacular.

Explaining doctrine in vernacular language is part of successful strategies for proselytization, but two additional interrelated tactics have been used in Japan to make the spread of teachings easier. One of these was the use of images, in statuary and especially in *emaki* 絵巻, or picture scrolls. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and medieval Buddhists clearly appreciated the truth of this statement. However, pictures are only worth any number of words if the audience shares a visual-verbal vocabulary and can recognize the rhetorical devices employed by an artist.[3] This leads to the second tactic, the establishment of specialist preachers who used *emaki* to explain religious information. With their ability to decipher (in an entertaining fashion, of course) the occasionally obscure images found in *emaki* depictions of hell, the six realms of existence (*rokudô* 六道), and various *engi* 縁起 foundation stories (of temples and shrines), these preachers, who were called *etoki* 絵解, proved through their office that there are times when a word may very well be worth a thousand pictures. Their practice, which went by the same name (*etoki*), was integral to the spread of belief due to its ability to create and maintain the religious imaginations of audiences.

Emaki

The categories of "art" and "religion" are not discrete in the picture scrolls of medieval and premodern Japan; they are largely coextensive. Most art was functional in ways aside from or in addition to aesthetic enjoyment—it served to map, to entertain, to save, to instruct, or (most probable) to do a combination of these. For example, many

emaki tell stories of the lives of important historical figures, serving the function of being aesthetically pleasing, mapping the area where a person lived, being instructive on the life of the person in question, and sharing an entertaining story.[4]

Emaki depictions of Shôtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574—622), the alleged founder of Japanese Buddhism, are one example. Like other ancient period religious figures such as Kûkai 空海 (the founder of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism), Shôtoku Taishi has been fully turned into a figure of legend.[5] He is famous for introducing Buddhism to Japan, for establishing a seventeen-article constitution with moral injunctions on how government officials should act, and his hagiography includes miraculous feats such as flying over mountains. There are a number of extant pictorial biographies (*eden* 絵伝) of Shôtoku Taishi, including some in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum, and also in the collections of some temples such as the hanging picture scrolls at Hôryûji 法隆寺 (allegedly founded by Shôtoku Taishi himself). These illustrated biographies are preserved not only on *emaki* scrolls, but also on *fusuma* 襖 doors or *byôbu* 屏風, folding screens.[6]

Other popular *emaki* images of late antiquity and the middle ages were pictures of hell, the six realms of existence, and the Pure Land (*Jôdo* 浄土). As Buddhist thought became more widespread in Japan, many people were attracted to the doctrine of reincarnation and the concept of karmic retribution for actions in the present or previous lives. Some popular images are of hell (or hells), many of which show the various tortures that await people who are cruel or unjust. These images sometimes included text in the vernacular, describing the torment that sinners would face. Many *emaki* also

depicted the Pure Land, or Western Paradise, of Amida 阿弥陀; these scrolls may have contributed to the rapid spread of Pure Land belief in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[7]

Another example of a popular *emaki* is the *engi emaki*, or foundation story picture scroll, of Kitano Tenmangû 北野天満宮, the shrine and temple complex dedicated to Tenman Tenjin 天満天神. Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真, a scholar and government official of the late Heian 平安 period (794—1185), was enshrined as Tenman Tenjin to pacify his spirit after he was unjustly demoted and persecuted before dying an unhappy death. Shortly after Michizane's death, several calamities befell the capital, including the illness of the emperor and an epidemic. According to the story, theories began to proliferate that it was the work of Michizane's angry spirit (*onryô* 怨霊), and eventually a shaman gave an oracle that suggested that it was indeed Sugawara who was responsible for the calamities. Thereafter he was enshrined at Kitano, which became one of the major shrines of Japan, and branch shrines now exist all over the country. As Tenman Tenjin, Michizane became an object of devotion in Shinto and Buddhist contexts, and is now generally regarded as the patron deity of academics due to his reputation as a great scholar and his association with the Edo period *terakoya* 寺子屋 temple schools. The *Kitano Tenmangû engi* 北野天満宮縁起 is a famous example of a foundation story, and the use of images to relate the story seems to have helped to spread Tenman Tenjin belief.[8]

There was, however, a major problem with *emaki* of the middle ages. While they used images to help relay their stories, the organization of the images was haphazard at

best, and when they included text it was often similarly disorganized. Stories would not necessarily move from top to bottom or right to left, but would skip from one part of the painting to another, often without any sort of boundary drawn to separate the elements of the painting. Or, if there were boundaries, they tended to be drawn as part of the landscape, so that a tree, mountain, or house actually served as a dividing line between two separate episodes in a story. Even though the images themselves might contribute to an easier understanding of the content, the (dis)organization of the painting would actually (and ironically) make it more difficult.[9] Many *emaki* thus seem to be a bewildering array of images even if they are actually conveying a story.[10]

Stories are not immediately self-evident through image alone, but necessarily are conjoined with text, monologue, or dialogue (or—if only image—very clear juxtaposition and sequencing) to achieve their narrative aims. As time went on the organization of paintings became clearer, but initially understanding *emaki* required the explanation of a specialist versed in the story, in the doctrines of the religion involved, or in the history of the shrine or temple in question. This specialist was called an *etoki*, and the sermons given based upon pictures went by the same name.

Etoki

Etoki is a practice in which temple priests and itinerant preachers utilized pictures to expound upon religious doctrine, both for semi-literate or illiterate commoners and for the edification of literate elites (who would still have had difficulty with Buddhist scriptures, which are written in classical Chinese, often with non-standard readings that are transliterations of Sanskrit terms).[11] Woefully understudied by art historians, scholars of literature, and scholars of religion, *etoki* as a practice was based on the perception of

the picture not only as a work of art, but also (even primarily) as a technology for helping to introduce audiences to religious concepts with which they may not have been familiar, simultaneously serving ritualistic, pedagogical, devotional, and entertaining functions.[12]

Etoki therefore brought the distant concepts of a largely inscrutable Buddhism[13] to the people, serving not only as a proselytizing technology for religious propagandizing and fundraising on the part of priests and nuns, but also as a ritual technology for the accumulation of merit (a staple of medieval as well as modern Japanese religious practice) among their audiences as well as a form of entertainment.[14] Additionally, popular forms of Japanese religions, including Buddhism and Shinto, were and are primarily practice-oriented sets of activity[15] that may have much to do with ritual and entertainment (tourism, festival play, accumulating merit, or experiencing "culture" or "tradition") and less to do—at least explicitly—with formal philosophical doctrine (outside of the activities of a minority of formal religious specialists).[16] Thus, the practice of *etoki* served to combine the generally leisurely and ritual elements of popular religious practice with a "visual literacy" regarding Buddhist cosmological and soteriological concepts, origin and miracle tales of shrines and temples, and *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 theories of indigenous kami 神 as manifestations of buddhas or bodhisattvas.

Etoki sermons were and are (for they are still practiced today at some temples) simultaneously edifying and entertaining, combining religious instruction and image-oriented entertainment in one practice. Significantly, Kaminishi Ikumi ties *etoki* practice to modern media:

> Historical evidence substantiates that since the twelfth century Japanese Buddhists have been using paintings to edify lay audiences with Buddhist knowledge, morals, and way of life. [The] *etoki* tradition, now a

> millennium old, continues to entice and entertain people even in this television age, although to some extent movies, TV, and the Internet [and of course I would add *manga* and *anime* to Kaminishi's list here] have replaced *etoki*. In essence, *etoki* and modern audiovisual entertainment are not so different in the way they use visual images to draw the viewer's attention while verbal texts—whether written or spoken—supply propagandizing messages.[17]

Manga and *anime* seem to be a modern manifestation of premodern *etoki* practice, particularly where they combine proselytization or moral suasion and entertainment in one package.[18] They are used by Buddhist sects,[19] new religions, and occasionally by lay artists to introduce or to reinforce religious thought in their audiences.[20]

The *manga* format, however, is clearly different from that of *emaki*, and *manga* has its own particular stylistic conventions. *Emaki* composition demands the role of the *etoki* preacher—it lacks the panels and clearly established "viewing conventions" found in modern *manga*.[21] While there are certain aspects of *emaki* scenes that functionally serve as panels (trees or buildings serving as boundaries between two scenes, for example), *emaki* composition lacks the right-to-left, top-to-bottom reading style that is standard to almost all *manga*.[22] Modern *manga* thus benefit from the stylistic conventions that developed from bound books and comics art in general. One important part of the development of these conventions is undoubtedly the role played by Edo period popular illustrated novels.

Kibyôshi

Japanese today are used to being surrounded by a large amount of printed material, but for the citizens of the early Edo period it was still relatively novel to have access to literature in large quantities (a reflection of innovations in printing technology).[23] As Japan moved into the middle Edo period, the growth of urban centers

and the growing power of the merchant class contributed to the development of literature that was primarily read for leisure.[24] Edo society also saw the development of book-lending services, many of which seem to have specialized in *kibyôshi* 黄表紙, which are often translated as "yellow-cover books." These were bound books made from low-quality paper that often included pictures, and—like modern *manga*—they were read rapidly and then passed on or discarded.[25] Although they had initially begun as books for children, gradually the content became more adult in orientation, and tended to include jokes, puns, or satire.

Humor, however, does not preclude the existence of religious themes, nor does the focus on the "floating world" of brothels and other places of leisure common to *kibyôshi* suggest diminished ability to deal with the religious (or other "serious" material).[26] Indeed, as Nam-lin Hur has suggested, the brothel culture and the temple culture of Edo were, in some respects, two sides of the same coin.[27] These media drew upon traditions like *etoki* and *dangi* 談議 [street oration] that had traditionally been associated with religion,[28] and utilized religion as a focal point for satire as well as for belief. For example, *dangibon* 談議本 were books that mocked the exhortatory sermonizing common to the Nichiren 日蓮, Ritsu 律, and Jôdo 浄土 Buddhist sects of the period.[29] Similarly, *kibyôshi* utilized travel narratives and guidebook literature to simultaneously entertain and instruct audiences about nominally religious destinations (pilgrimage routes in particular) while providing titillation and hilarity as well.[30]

Premodern *kibyôshi* and modern *manga* are not synonymous, although they are related.[31] Like modern *manga*, *kibyôshi* include combinations of image and text. Unlike

manga, however, *kibyôshi* do not make clear distinctions between text and image (or they separate the text above from the picture below), and the images tend to be static—there is little or no use of frames within pages to show transitions or action. I argue that it would take other, more modern developments in picture-based storytelling to make the fundamental paradigm shift from static pictures presented in juxtaposition with text to *manga*, which juxtaposes images and text in a more fluid and interactive fashion, and ultimately to *anime*, which not only juxtaposes static images but does so in such rapid succession that it is able to approximate real-time motion (or at least give the illusion of doing so).

Kamishibai

Kata Kôji's 加太こうじ autobiographical history of *kamishibai* 紙芝居 (literally, "paper plays") points to some connections between religion, art, and performance in this modern art form that directly preceded *manga*, *anime*, and television. *Kamishibai* are oral performances of stories that are accompanied by large illustrated cards slotted into a wooden frame in succession—each illustration accompanies a different scene in the story. Originally the stories were produced by individual artists who maintained a monopoly on the images and scripts of their stories, but gradually the cards (particularly those of successful stories) came to be produced en masse, and the stories would be written on the back of each card so that storytellers could memorize and perform new stories relatively quickly. Itinerant performers of *kamishibai* were especially active in the Taishô and Shôwa eras, and a thriving entertainment industry arose associated with the production of *kamishibai* stories and illustrations, including long-running serializations focused on a particular lovable protagonist (a staple of modern *manga*).

Kata traces the rise of *kamishibai* in the late Meiji era to adaptations in *sekkyôbushi* 説教節—moralistic Buddhist stories that were gradually augmented with visual aids, particularly rudimentary projected images called *utsushi-e* 写し絵, or paper puppets [*ritsu-e* 立絵].[32] Many of these also included *yôkaidan* 妖怪談, or ghost stories. The content of *kamishibai* seems to have developed primarily in a fashion similar to American comic books, with superhuman protagonists fighting evil villains in the name of justice (e.g., "Golden Bat," a superhero named after the tobacco). Because of their origin in dramatic presentation, although they used static images, *kamishibai* developed a more interactive and dynamic style of image-based storytelling. The oratory skills of the performers were enhanced by multiple images shown in succession, as opposed to one large image serving as the source of the story (*emaki*) or several smaller images accompanied by descriptive text and dialogue (*kibyôshi*). The transitions between frames of the story allowed for *kamishibai* artists to build dramatic tension in their stories, and the relatively high number of frames contributed to the sense of action and movement.[33] *Kamishibai* formed a booming entertainment industry in the first half of the twentieth century (although they were censored by the wartime government), and even continued in the postwar period until being supplanted by television and the rise in mass-produced *manga* magazines.

Many of the *kamishibai* artists took up work in the postwar period writing *manga* (or the more adult genre of *gekiga* 劇画) for book-lending shops.[34] Some highly successful *kamishibai* artists such as Shirato Sanpei 白戸三平 and Mizuki Shigeru 水木しげる gradually transitioned to creating serialized *manga* stories.[35] Mizuki, for

example, developed his unique style of occult *manga* (he is perhaps most famous for *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarô* 『ゲゲゲの鬼太郎』 [*Creepy Kitarô*]) over several decades, and continued to touch upon occult, spiritual, and religious themes in his works.[36]

Kamishibai itself, of course, could not compete with television, especially as increasing numbers of households acquired the devices. However, the rise of *anime* as a genre in many ways can be seen as a natural extension of *kamishibai* practice. By the 1970's *manga* and *gekiga* artists had cornered the market on printed visual-verbal entertainment, and *anime*—based upon *manga*—was increasingly being broadcast on television and screened in theatres.

CONTEMPORARY *MANGA* AND *ANIME*

Manga are illustrated serial novels. They are generally initially published in large weekly or monthly magazines of several hundred pages, and a single episode by a particular author may occupy only twenty pages or so out of several hundred. These episodes are then collected into paperback (usually) or hardback books and republished in several volumes, each volume consisting of several episodes over a total of about two hundred pages. Publishers of *manga* thus maximize their profits by selling *manga* in serialization in bulky magazines printed on cheap paper, and then again in bound compilations of slightly higher quality. When these also sell well, publishers gain a third time by animating the story for television or for the theater. While some *anime* are produced solely for the theater or for television, the vast majority (around ninety percent) still derives from *manga* series.[37] However, *anime* do have the unfortunate tendency to simplify *manga* storylines to fit them into time and budget limitations, even when they are directed by the *manga* artist him- or herself.[38]

Like Japanese novels, *manga* are read from right to left. Generally readers start at the top of a page and work left, then down, the page. *Manga* generally juxtapose clearly defined frames of various sizes with speech bubbles containing dialogue and onomatopoeia built into the image; third person omniscient narrative is often contained in boxes with clearly delineated angles. The margins of most *manga* are white, although some authors switch to black when showing a flashback scene. Patterned backgrounds indicate powerful emotional tension or magical or supernatural action, while changes between ink and drawing utensils—combined with the sparing use of (expensive) color—contribute to the emotional impact of certain scenes.

Because of the effectiveness of these technical conventions, like good novels, the genius of *manga* as a technology for relating a story is that the paper media of a well-written *manga* disappears.[39] The power of the narrative and of the image pulls the reader's attention into the imaginary world of the *manga*, so that the reader temporarily forgets that he or she is holding the *manga* as a physical object. This quality is directly connected to the stylistic conventions that *manga* artists use and modify in their art and their storytelling—conventions that in turn came to be essential in *anime* as well.

The Grammar and Rhetoric of Sequential Images with Text

Late twentieth century *manga* culture, while clearly influenced by American and European comic works, developed into a unique genre that is markedly different from these western counterparts.[40] In part this is related to the processes of production—*manga* artists have traditionally been less constrained than their American and European peers in terms of the length or content of their stories, and have generally taken a "high-context, low-content" approach to the art form by emphasizing images over text.[41]

Modern *manga*, encouraged by a relatively sympathetic publishing industry and the use of low-grade paper,[42] were able to expand the range of their stories over several thousands of pages, largely due to their extensive use of dialogue-free panels to demonstrate mood, the passage of time, and otherwise inexpressible aspects of their plots. In part, it is this quality of *manga* combinations of image and text, along with the general conventions of the comics art form itself, that lends modern *manga* to the treatment and dissemination of religious themes.

Comics theorist Scott McCloud's groundbreaking work on the art form of comics, while retaining some problematic essentialist assumptions regarding the approaches to art of East and West, provides excellent tools for apprehending the conventions of the comics genre. McCloud's work illustrates (literally—the book is in comic format itself) the ways the medium of comics separates itself from other forms of art, from literature, and from film. With the base definition of comics as "sequential art," further nuanced by the working definition of comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer,"[43] McCloud moves the discussion of the medium beyond the generally pejorative tendency to look at comics as something less than serious art and also as somehow inferior to "serious" literature.[44]

There are several characteristics of comics that contribute to its unique quality to convey information while also stimulating aesthetic and emotional responses in its audience. One major one is iconic representation. McCloud argues that the farther away from reality an image gets, the closer it gets to an idea or an ideal. The iconic hero thus takes on more persuasive power than the photorealistic hero, because it allows for a

higher level of reader identification with the protagonist (and sometimes depicting antagonists in more realistic fashion makes them emotionally further from the reader, thus subtly emphasizing the initial affective bond with the more iconic protagonist). Japanese artists in particular have often combined detailed backgrounds with iconic protagonists and realistic or otherwise "othered" antagonists, thus leading to high levels of affinity between reader and hero.[45]

Another element of comics art is the function of the "gutter," or the space between panels. The existence of panels alone minimizes the problem of *how* to read the *manga*—young readers quickly absorb the right-left, top-down pattern of reading. While premodern picture scrolls tended to jumble the chronological events of a person's hagiography or of a miracle tale in a bewildering array of images without clear distinctions or progression, comics art utilizes very clearly defined conventions so that any person with a basic knowledge of where to begin can understand how to read the story.[46]

Relying upon the concept of "closure," where the mind of the viewer fills in the temporal or contextual space between panels, comics artists have utilized a variety of transitions in order to move their stories forward.[47] McCloud categorizes these transitions as follows: 1) moment-to-moment (imagine a flip book, where each frame shows a successive instant); 2) action-to-action (in one frame a ball is thrown, the next frame shows the batter hitting the ball); 3) subject-to-subject (the same scene, but shown by focusing on two or more different subjects in successive panels); 4) scene-to-scene (generally used to show distance in time or place); 5) aspect-to-aspect (used to show several interrelated aspects of the same moment or scene in separate panels); and 6) non-

sequitur. Of these types, the vast majority of comics art worldwide utilizes types two through four to relate the entirety of a story. However, Japanese *manga* tends to utilize the entire range of the six (although the non-sequitur, predictably, is usually only rarely thrown in for gag effect). The pioneer in this process was undoubtedly Tezuka Osamu 手塚治虫, whose development of cinematic effects (close-ups, panning, cutaways, montage) within *manga* created new ways of envisioning transitions between panels.[48] Tezuka's work was so widely read and so incredibly influential that many successful *manga* artists since have relied on his stylistic vocabulary at least to some degree.[49]

Tezuka is widely regarded as a pioneer in his field. Not only did he develop a cinematic style of illustration and thus significantly contribute to the development of the genre of "story *manga*" (works that extend over hundreds or thousands of pages),[50] he also helped to develop experimental forums, such as his magazine *COM*, for *manga* with more adult themes.[51] From early on, Tezuka's work was being widely acclaimed as innovative and iconoclastic, and a number of prominent artists have publicly acknowledged their debt to his work.[52] Tezuka is commonly referred to as *manga no kamisama* マンガの神様 (literally, "the god of *manga*"), and although his work has not been entirely without criticism,[53] he remains a well-respected figure in the Japanese imagination. Significantly, a number of Tezuka's works have dealt with religious themes.[54]

Comic stylistic conventions like Tezuka's—now common to much of *manga* in general—can give the illusion of the passage of time and occurrence of motion and action. Frames and panels help artists to illustrate the passage of time, while the use of

action lines allows them to depict motion within individual frames.[55] Japanese artists also developed what McCloud calls "subjective motion," where they placed the audience's viewpoint in a place synchronous or identical with the active object (as in a viewpoint of one's own hands gripping the handlebars of a motorcycle traveling at high speed as opposed to a static viewpoint watching a motorcycle move by at high speed).[56] Combined with realistic backgrounds and iconic representations of protagonists, this compression of the reader's viewpoint and that of the protagonist further enhances the vicarious impression of "being there" in the story. The cinematic style of illustration allows *manga* artists to develop their stories with high levels of complexity and emotional depth; as a consequence, they often invite strong emotional responses.[57]

While some might argue that the use of images serves as a crutch for the imagination, the power of a well-written *manga* is that the images actually help to create imagined worlds. The process of closure (between frames) still demands readers' imaginative involvement, and static images as used in *manga* (to set the scene for a story, for example) combined with onomatopoeia, synechdochic representation, and a shared vocabulary of stylized depictions of intangible things (three wavy lines indicate odor, patterned backgrounds indicate emotional tension, a bead of sweat indicates frustration or anxiety, a nosebleed indicates erotic arousal, and so forth)—as well as third-person omniscient commentary and characters' dialogue—create a world that is rich in sensory information.[58] This sensory information is delivered in a compact format relative to the novel.

Unlike a novel, a *manga* can substitute images for the lengthy strings of signifiers novelists require to describe mood, setting, or internal states. *Manga* are therefore

extremely efficient in conveying (and evoking) emotion. They also have an advantage over novels in expressing supposedly ineffable moments in their stories. Novelists literally need to make language break down—or alternatively need to engage in descriptive frenzy—to describe such moments. *Manga*, in contrast, can abandon language altogether and simply resort to image. While images are also a form of expression, the lack of text in such scenes rhetorically suggests an ineffable moment.

In Tezuka Osamu's *Budda* 『ブッダ』 [*Buddha*], for example, the young Shiddaruta (Tezuka's rendition of the historical Buddha's given name) realizes at the moment of his enlightenment that "one has a connection to everything!" This summation of his enlightenment precedes a full-page dialogue-free spread depicting a web of interconnected organisms.[59] Thus, the content of the Buddha's enlightenment is not expressed in a verbal articulation of the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Path, the most common codifications of the event (and convenient mnemonic devices). Instead, Tezuka visually presents the doctrine of Dependent Origination (Skt. *pratîtyasamutpâda*, Jp. *engi* 縁起, also a part of the Buddha's enlightenment), and therefore implicitly suggests that the entirety of the enlightenment can be reduced to this doctrine. Visual presentation of religious experience can thus both simplify and distort, but it is inarguably efficient at conveying rather complicated information (the Buddha's enlightenment in this case).

Similarly, in the sci-fi mythological *manga* adventure *Yamataika* 『ヤマタイカ』 [*The Legend of Yamataika*],[60] the characters' repeated and deepening revelations about the hidden meanings of Japanese mythology are expressed through a combination of third-person omniscient commentary, the dialogue of the characters in the story, and

dialogue-free scenes depicting an idealized vision of the ludic ritual practices of ancient Japanese people. In the same story, characters' empathic bonds with one another and their internal revelations are also depicted with only fragmentary dialogue and rich images, giving the impression of ineffable states of consciousness.

Intimately connected to this rhetorically effective use of image is the use of iconic representation in *manga* works. As McCloud argues, iconic representations of the real world and real people, precisely because of their level of distortion (in the sense of ideated—rather than realistic—figuration), pull the reader vicariously into the text: "The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled... an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!"[61] The distortion inherent in iconic representation is similar to the distortion inherent in art in general—the value of art lies as much or more in its ability to represent ideals than in its ability to represent reality. Similarly, the cartoon style of depiction, replete with exaggeration and hyperbole, is quite effective in conveying and educing emotion. The end result is a relatively high level of sympathy with protagonists and the story content in general. While vicarious experience is inherent in most forms of fiction, in *manga* it is visually enhanced through the iconic, illustrated protagonist.

Not only do iconic protagonists pull in readers' awareness and identities, but illustration also allows artists to put readers into a first-person perspective to a degree that is rare in novels (a convention perhaps borrowed from films—novels written in the second person, for example, are extremely rare). While most literature and film involves some degree of vicarious experience, the iconic nature of the illustrated *manga/anime*

protagonist—his or her visual representation of pure emotion or experience, characterized by the efficient and effective use of exaggeration and hyperbole—helps to dissolve the boundaries between the character's personality and that of the viewer; in similar fashion, the rapid changes between first- and third-person perspectives in many *manga* heighten the sensation of being part of the story. Thus, each individual reader becomes drawn into the story on multiple levels simultaneously; this can sometimes generate strong feelings of sympathy with protagonists and their missions.

To be clear, usage of the *manga* medium is not a guarantee of narrative success. When cinematic effects and iconic representation are unskillfully executed, or when stories are overly formulaic, *manga* become uninspired, insipid, and cliché (perhaps one reason for the easy dismissal of the medium on the part of literature purists). The use of images does indeed have the potential to stifle readers' imaginative involvement, and prosaic storylines invite boredom more than pathos. Narrative success, measured here by audience involvement in the story, relies upon masterful execution of *manga* stylistic conventions as well as similarly masterful storytelling. In other words, the use of images does not necessarily make story content more fun or interesting, and artwork—like text—requires skill to be rhetorically effective or to have an affective quality.

A fitting example might be the *manga* entitled *Dôgen-sama* 『道元さま』 [*Dôgen*], the hagiography of Japanese Sôtô Zen sect 曹洞宗 founder Dôgen found on the Sôtô website.[62] Although presumably designed to invite faith or inspire, this awkwardly pedantic *manga*—like many products created solely or primarily for didactic purposes—lacks character development (the weight of Dôgen's historic personality as a famous

denominational founder is apparently intended to serve as a substitute) and also lacks the narrative tension—provided by conflict and its resolution—inherent in most successful *manga*. Even through the medium of the screen (as an online *manga*), *Dôgen-sama* seems almost painfully tangible, and the potential for that medium to "disappear" as the audience reads the text is minimal. Uninspired, *Dôgen-sama* is likewise uninspiring.

In contrast, however, Tezuka's hagiography of the historical Buddha, mentioned above, has enjoyed commercial success due to its narrative and artistic genius. Clearly the treatment of potentially didactic themes (hagiography of Gautama Siddhartha or Dôgen in this case) does not necessitate narrative failure. Rather, it is the quality of artists' deployment of *manga* conventions that determines success.

Like novels and films, *manga* can languish in mediocrity. Their effectiveness as stories—and particularly as religious stories—relies upon authors' abilities to invite and maintain the emotional involvement of the audience through illustration and plot. This affective success is a prerequisite for effective usage of the imaginative qualities of fiction in the service of disseminating religious thought, or conversely, for effective usage of the imaginative qualities of religion in the service of creating entertaining stories. Of course, these same prerequisites apply to *anime*.

The Juxtaposition of Moving Images with a Script

Like *manga*, *anime* could be said to juxtapose text with image, if text in this case is taken to mean the script of the dialogue of the work in question. Just as with *manga*, *anime* strategically use dialogue and image in conjunction to convey their stories. Like *manga*, *anime* tactically use scenes devoid of dialogue (or dialogue over static scenes) to convey mood. Unlike *manga*, however, *anime* benefit from the additional sensory

stimulus of sound—the script of *anime* comes alive through the timbre and timing of actors' voices, soundtracks elevate tension and augment climax, and sound effects give the appearance of motion even when scenes are static.

Anime has its own unique stylistic conventions (which, incidentally, reflect the influence of *manga* on *anime*—the same principle of closure applies), and utilizes a wide variety of perspectives, tracking shots, pans, and close-ups, making it qualitatively different from American animation.[63] To audiences unfamiliar with *anime*, techniques such as slow panning over characters' faces between lines of dialogue can seem jarring or excruciatingly slow, but these serve to heighten emotional tension in the story (incidentally, these techniques may inherit the use of dramatic pauses in Japanese drama like *kabuki* 歌舞伎). Yet *anime* can also move at lightning pace, barraging viewers with a series of images in rapid succession that is equally effective (if qualitatively different) in expressing mood. *Anime* may also utilize dialogue and sound effects in an action scene where the only action is a relatively small number of images with "action lines" drawn in the background to convey the impression of rapid motion (an inheritance from *manga*). In these and similar scenes, where the background disappears in order to draw attention to the emotional duress or intensity experienced by the protagonist, *anime* ceases to solely depict action on the virtual filmic "stage," depicting instead the protagonist's internal state.[64] Incidentally, similar effects are probably only produced on stage and screen through vigorous emoting on the part of actors, or through the more efficient but potentially jarring use of asides or monologues.

Although images alone may be insufficient for telling a story, *within* a story they can serve to express emotion, and dialogue-free scenes in *anime* (as in *manga*) can

heighten the sense of powerful emotion or nearly ineffable experience. In the same way that the tangible *manga* medium (the paper) disappears as readers are absorbed into the plot of a masterfully created *manga*, the physical technology of the screen dissolves in the case of well-made *anime*. Like *manga*, *anime* heightens vicarious experience, and similarly benefits from iconic protagonists and "othered" antagonists.

Anime exist at the boundary of static image and motion by virtue of their technical execution (static frames shown in rapid succession in order to give the appearance of motion), and the aesthetic draw of animated film is precisely that it creates the illusion of movement and action by juxtaposing a series of synchronic illustrations on a diachronic timeline, creating an approximation—albeit a distorted one—of reality. Films capture reality (actors and sets creating representations of reality) in the nature of a photograph; they mimic reality in exact correlation. In contrast, *anime* create simulacra of reality through the medium of illustration (one step removed from photorealistic portrayal) and the stylistic conventions that *anime* shares with (and inherited from) *manga*. *Anime* therefore inherently contain an element of the fantastic because their representations of near-reality are iconic, hyperbolic, and synechdochic.[65] Note that modern *manga* is characterized by attempts to mimic film, and therefore created a cinematic grammar of depiction; *anime* inherited that grammar (and its attendant distortions) and reinserted it wholesale into the medium of film, resulting in a unique cinematic style that is qualitatively different from live-action film and from other types of animation.

Anime allows directors to create images that ordinary live-action films produce only with great difficulty (although computer graphics are gradually blurring the line between the two). Directors play with physically distorting characters and backgrounds,

and can give the impression of ordinary people performing superhuman feats without the limitations of using human actors and their physical abilities or inabilities, or physical sets hampered by the laws of physics. *Anime* can also depict internal states in a way that is virtually impossible (or at least very difficult) for ordinary film by virtue of their ability to illustrate (rather than emote or explain) the intangible internal landscape.[66] These qualities contribute to the capacity of *anime* to treat religious themes.

Anime maximizes the sensation of being transported to another reality, and the feeling of escape to a fantastic world can be coupled with feelings of inspiration and transformation in the present.[67] Viewing *anime* also heightens the sensation of being part of an audience and of sharing the experience with others. Because of this quality, it seems that *anime* may be more effective than *manga* in contributing to conversion experiences or to feelings of inspiration, exaltation, or liberation. No doubt this is enhanced with a musical score, although it is offset by the simplification of *manga* storylines that almost inevitably takes place within *anime*.

Manga and *Anime* as Religious Texts

Any number of entertainment products throughout Japanese history has had religious themes, but these products become increasingly *functionally* religious when—in addition to the inclusion of religious themes—they are produced or consumed "religiously."[68] Yet if consumers are reading *manga* or watching *anime* religiously, at least to some degree, there must be some inherent characteristics of these products that lend themselves to apparently religious reception (e.g., canonization or exegesis).

Novels and live-action films, for example, also draw upon existing religious traditions and can contribute to the dissemination of religious ideas.[69] Yet the

fundamental technical and narrative difference between *manga* and novels (or between *anime* and live-action films) is that *manga* and *anime* exist at the boundary between static image and motion.[70] *Manga* and *anime* function through the illusion—predicated upon the imaginative process of closure—of juxtaposed static images as images in motion; this illusion makes these media particularly appropriate for representing thaumaturgy, apotheosis, transfiguration, enlightenment, or any other number of experiences or events that might be related to the imaginative activities of religion. The willing suspension of disbelief inherent in fiction and art—and thus integral to the imaginative participation in closure upon which the viewing of *manga* and *anime* is predicated—is, conversely, the voluntary (if possibly temporary) assumption of credulity. Readiness to participate in a narrative through belief is common to both fiction and religion, as is the readiness to interpret illustrated images as reality.[71]

The particular power of these media to convey religious content and to evoke religious responses is also tied to their ability to depict—and therefore to elicit—emotion through illustration and to surpass the boundaries of spoken and written language. Pictures, with their capacity to appeal directly to the most visceral and elemental parts of our personalities, create profound responses in ways that printed text or spoken dialogue alone cannot.[72] The combination of static images with text or a script and the calculated adjustment of the ratio of text or dialogue to each particular image lends itself to heightening emotional tension due to the power of illustrated images to convey complex feelings, scenes, or a barrage of sensual information in an extremely concise, efficient format. *Manga* and *anime* do not have to *describe* the fantastic, the horrific, or the sublime; they can depict it, invoke it, or even be it. Furthermore, because illustration is

simultaneously removed from and akin to reality—because it both depicts and distorts—*manga* and *anime* have the capability and the license to imagine, to exaggerate, and to stretch the limits of plausibility in the service of their storytelling. They are thus appropriate media for stories concerning the supernatural.

In addition to the characteristic combination of juxtaposed static illustrated images with text or dialogue that is perhaps unique to *manga* and *anime*, the reception of these media happens largely at the level of the individual, and supports the increasingly popular pattern of individuals (who may be skeptical of organized religion) approaching religious information as isolated consumers (this is, incidentally, not limited to *manga* and *anime*).[73] Yet the individualism inherent in the consumption of *manga* culture does not necessarily mean that individuals do not create groups based on their affective and intellectual responses to certain works. In some cases like-minded fans create not only Internet-based message boards, but also other groups that serve as virtual or real sacred spaces[74] or communities based around a common interest in *manga* or *anime* works that they find to be inspiring or perceive to be inspired.[75] *Manga* and *anime* thus come to be casually or formally canonized among groups of fans—casually in the sense that they are recommended as "must-reads," and formally in the sense that some *manga* and *anime* do become liturgical models or scripture for some religious groups (or fan groups that function in a quasi-religious fashion).

Additionally, the vast majority of *manga* and *anime* are privately produced for profit, removing them to the relatively "safe" realm of the marketplace and away from religious institutions' censorship and indoctrination. This means that they are free to modify existing religious information as they see fit in the service of creating exciting

and entertaining stories (again, this is not limited to *manga* and *anime*). Well-crafted *manga* and *anime* thus pack the emotive power of good narrative alongside the irenic or inspiring elements of religious thought, but without the potentially oppressive obligations of allegiance to a tradition.

By placing religious information into the framework of individual consumption, religious *manga* culture is able to largely bypass the oversight of religious institutions. Unless commissioned by a specific religious group, religious *manga* is not required to follow any specific doctrine, and often liberally picks and chooses from a number of religious institutions, mythologies, and philosophies from around the world.[76] *Manga* and *anime* are not exactly iconoclastic—they would doubtless find it inconvenient to obliterate the powerful imagery and narrative tropes offered by religious traditions. Rather, these media are *iconoplastic*—like other entertainment media they mold existing religious information and imagery to suit their narrative needs.

The degree to which these needs coincide with those of the religions involved varies. The freedom from institutional oversight that *manga* and *anime* enjoy allows them to freely play with religious content without censorship, but it can also present historically or doctrinally inaccurate or inconsistent information to audiences. The meanings of religious terms shift when irreverently put to use by *manga* artists and animators, but many people—especially young people—become aware of religious terminology, history, and mythology through their use of *manga* and *anime*.[77] The iconoplastic tendencies of *manga* and *anime* mean that some conservatives may criticize them for adulterating religious information, but regardless of the degree of their fidelity to traditions, they do keep that information in public consciousness. Religious

denominations and their doctrines are not (and never have been) reified entities impervious to internal change or external pressure.

The media of *manga* and *anime* vary in their commitments to the didactic or aesthetic elements of their stories (the subject of the following chapter), but they do inherit the long history of visual-verbal approaches to religious narratives in Japan—the conventions and innovations of media such as *emaki*, *kibyôshi*, and *kamishibai*, as well as of celluloid film. Clearly the history of these vernacular approaches to religion suggests that producers of these various media might respond to what they perceive as desire for religious information on the part of the audience; the popular success of products with religious themes may also create the tendency to include religious content in stories designed to entertain as well as those designed to instruct, persuade, or convert. Whatever the religious motivations of producers and their audiences (casual interest or fervent faith), the contemporary genre of religious *manga* and *anime* can and does incite religious responses in part of its audience.

Conclusions

The distinction between fiction, religion, and art is an artificial one that is no more applicable to contemporary *manga* and *anime* than it was to *emaki* and similar premodern media. *Manga* and *anime* inherit the Japanese legacy of visual-verbal entertainment associated with religious teachings, and form a large share of the entertainment media culture that absorbs, reconfigures, and disseminates religious content and spirituality themes in the everyday lives of Japanese people and, increasingly, people outside of Japan. They also serve as a source of information about religions in the contemporary period, where formal religious movements can no longer rely upon traditional rural

community structures or governmental connections to ensure their relationships with their members or adherents.[78] While associated with casual leisure pursuits, they can still lead to increased and diversified religious knowledge, increasing interaction with spirituality movements or religions in general, and can sometimes lead to the alteration or development of specific religious beliefs or ritual practices.

At the same time, *manga* and *anime* can also be used in a pedagogical fashion by formal religious institutions or individual authors with specific religious ideologies, and there are examples of religions developing from fan groups devoted to a particular *manga* or author.[79] These entertainment media, therefore, play a crucial role in disseminating information about religion in informal contexts, and both formal religions and lay producers are creating media that fall within the category of what I am calling "religious *manga* and *anime*" in order to maintain or create connections with consumer-adherents.[80]

Manga and *anime* have worked their way deeply into contemporary religious culture; religious themes have similarly worked their way into a seemingly inextricable relationship with *manga* storylines. Yet producers of what I am calling religious *manga* culture may or may not feel comfortable with explicitly labeling their work or its content as religious in orientation or effect. The works in question may also not be associated with any particular religious tradition because they enjoy considerable leeway in playing with a wide range of religious content in Japan's increasingly globalized society. Furthermore, in light of commonly held perceptions of Japanese secularism that tend to treat religion as a vestigial remnant of Japan's past, it is quite common for combinations of media and religious content to focus on amusing, "traditional," or edifying elements as opposed to emphasizing anything that might be called explicitly "religious."[81] Yet the

religion is still there—it is merely masked (sometimes through torturous feats of discursive prestidigitation).[82]

The relationship between media and religion has recently received increasing scholarly attention,[83] but the most compelling summation of that relationship to date (at least for the purposes of the present work) is George Tanabe's statement:

> [Visual media] can be defined as (1) public presentations, live or recorded, that (2) follow a script, prepared or impromptu, (3) to give meaning to visual images, real or animated, (4) about certain subject matters, that is, aspects of religion in this case. ... [R]eligion can be defined as an imaginary construct accepted as a reality to be experienced in some form of personal or social transformation. When religious people or secular producers use the media in order to express something about spirits or a spiritual world, these elements come into play, and religion, defined here as any interest in the spiritual, can be analyzed as a media form itself.[84]

Media and religion are thus locked together in a mutually influential relationship, and the process of mediating religious content can also sometimes be seen as the process of spiritualizing—and possibly sanctifying—entertainment media. The strongly vicarious nature of *manga* and *anime* enhances their ability to inspire or motivate their readers and viewers. Like other forms of inspiring literature and film, *manga* and *anime* are read or viewed multiple times, are recommended and passed around between peers (*mawashiyomi* 回し読み), and are sometimes the catalysts for changes in personal behavior, including changes in knowledge about religion, belief, ritual practice, and changes in outlooks on life or in lifestyle decisions. The particular qualities of these products—their rhetorical persuasiveness and their aesthetic appeal—allow for them to both *include* and to *be* religious information and to serve as sites for religious practice.

NOTES

[1] Meir Shahar, "Vernacular Fiction and the Transmission of Gods' Cults in Late Imperial China," in Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds. *Unruly Gods*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

[2] On this subject, see Willa J. Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988). However, the urge to trace modern *manga* and *anime* to earlier media should also be undertaken with care; these efforts often fall into what I call "*manga*pology"—attempts to justify the value of *manga* by associating it with high tradition. On this danger, see Jaqueline Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, Historicity," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), esp. 305—309. As an example of the most egregious attempts to trace themes in modern *manga* back to traditional Buddhist literature, see Rajyashree Pandey's article in the same volume. Rajyashree Pandey, "Medieval Genealogies of Manga and Anime Horror," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008). The genealogy presented in this chapter is designed to show continuity between religious uses of image and text throughout Japanese history, but does not seek to suggest that *manga* and *anime* are the same as *emaki* picture scrolls, nor do I suggest that the historical transition from these premodern media to contemporary *manga* and *anime* has been an unadulterated process.

[3] Willa Tanabe describes the transition from text-based renditions of the popular Lotus Sutra to ones augmented with—and eventually supplanted by—image alone. As she emphasizes, however, familiarity with the content of the text remains paramount. See Willa Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra*, esp. 50—52.

[4] On these points, see Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and* Etoki *Storytelling in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 54. As Barbara Ruch has illustrated, the mundane concerns of the audience were just as important as formal doctrine in *etoki* performance, and the two presumably influenced one another. See Barbara Ruch, "Coping with Death: Paradigms of Heaven and Hell and the Six Realms in Early Literature and Painting," in James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi, eds. *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). I argue that the same interactions happen within modern *manga*.

[5] Incidentally, *Hi izuru tokoro no tenshi* 日出処の天使, by Yamagishi Ryôko, is one of several contemporary *manga* that deal with this figure. Yamagishi portrays the prince as a conniving and cross-dressing thaumaturge engaged in a clandestine love affair with Soga no Emishi, son of Soga no Umako.

[6] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*: 31—54.

[7] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*: 74—99. Similarly, Barbara Ruch describes how the nuns of Kumano who engaged in *etoki* practice helped to disseminate faith in the Heart Sutra [*Hannya shingyô* 般若心經], as well as how the apocryphal Blood Pool Hell Sutra [*Ketsubonkyô* 血盆經]. See Ruch, "Woman to Woman: Kumano bikuni Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan," in Barbara Ruch, ed. *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002).

[8] YONEI Teruyoshi 米井輝義, "Kitano tenjin engi" 北野天神縁起 [The Origin Story of Kitano Tenjin], in INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, ed. *Encyclopedia of Shinto* (Tokyo: Kôbundô, 1999).

[9] Incidentally, although some mandala do include clearly delineated panels or cartouches, without knowledge of the tradition in question deciphering their stories or the (generally cosmological) doctrines they allegedly represent is similarly difficult.

[10] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 31—54.

[11] The role played by women in the *etoki* tradition should not be overlooked. See Barbara Ruch, "Woman to Woman."

[12] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 54. Kaminishi focuses on Buddhism in her book, but the Shinto tradition also demonstrates the use of image in explicating origin stories (*engi* 縁起) and mythology, as well as *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 theories of indigenous kami as manifestations of Buddhist deities. On the culture of *etoki*, especially its practitioners and its content, see Ruch, "Woman to Woman." In this article

and elsewhere, Ruch describes how the specificity of the intended audience (women, for example) led to changes in *etoki* sermon content. Also see Barbara Ruch, "Coping with Death." The specificity of audience needs applies to contemporary *manga* and *anime* as well; see Jaqueline Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse," 296—298.

[13] As Ian Reader and George Tanabe point out, the very inscrutability of Buddhism has long been a staple of its appeal and its popular image in Japan. Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 74—75.

[14] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 117—118.

[15] ISOMAE Jun'ichi 磯前順一, *Kindai nihon no shûkyô gensetsu to sono keifu: shûkyô—kokka—Shintô* 近代日本の宗教言説とその系譜—宗教—国家—神道 [*Modern Japan's Religious Discourse and its Genealogy: Religion, State, Shinto*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 29—38, esp. 35—36; Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*.

[16] On this element of Japanese religion, I would encourage readers to peruse the *Nova Religio* special issue on media and religion in Japan, vol. 10, no. 3, 2007. See especially George Tanabe's article, "Playing with Religion," 100.

[17] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 193.

[18] Although I agree with Kaminishi that we should look for continuity between modern and premodern media here, I offer the caveat that *etoki* as traditionally practiced by the Kumano *etoki* nuns, for example, seems to have entered into decline in the Edo period. See Barbara Ruch, "Woman to Woman: Kumano bikuni Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan," in Barbara Ruch, ed. *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 575—576.

[19] Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 30.

[20] KITAHARA Naohiko 北原尚彦, *Honya ni wa nai manga* 本屋にはないマンガ [*Manga that are not in bookstores*] (Tokyo: Nagasaki Publishing, 2005), 87—149.

[21] Even the didactic and contemplative illustrative forms of mandala, which are relatively thematically and sequentially organized, still required the inclusion of explanatory monologue or text.

[22] Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures*, 31—54.

[23] Adam Kern, *Manga from the Floating World:* Kibyôshi *and the Comicbook Culture of Edo Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 35.

[24] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 8.

[25] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 37—41.

[26] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 10.

[27] Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[28] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 112.

[29] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 97—98.

[30] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 104.

[31] Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 26.

[32] KATA Kôji 加太こうじ, *Kamishibai Shôwa shi* 紙芝居昭和史 [*The Shôwa Era History of* Kamishibai] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2004), 3—7. On the subject of *sekkyôbushi*, see Susan Matisoff, "Holy Horrors: The Sermon-Ballads of Medieval and Early Modern Japan," in James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi, eds. *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 234—261.

[33] The introduction of film technology in the Meiji era undoubtedly contributed to the development of this medium, and most definitely affected the development of both *manga* and *anime*.

[34] Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 24.

[35] Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 24.

[36] Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 177—182.

[37] Steve Trautlein, cited in Mark W. MacWilliams, "Introduction," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

[38] Napier, *Anime*, 20.

[39] Jeff Bezos, cited in Steven Levy, "The Future of Reading," Newsweek, 26 November 2007.
[40] On the tensions and continuities between Euroamerican and Japanese comics styles, see Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse," 299—300. Berndt also points to the importance of the Japanese economy surrounding *manga* and *anime* production.
[41] Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 42—44; Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial in association with Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), 77—80. McCloud continues by making some egregious assumptions about the essential nature of Occidental and Oriental culture, but his awareness of the differences between the structure of Japanese *manga* and American comics, largely based upon differences in production, is notable. For a more nuanced reading, see Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 22—28.
[42] Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 25; Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 42—44.
[43] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 9.
[44] On this well-documented attitude, see Kern, *Manga from the Floating World*, 13—23.
[45] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 35—45, esp. 43—45. A Japanese artist who uses this element to great propagandistic effect is Kobayashi Yoshinori 小林よしのり, whose depictions of himself (and consequently of his extremely conservative politics) are always iconic, but who depicts perceived antagonists (former Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro 小泉純一郎, for example) in a relatively, sometimes highly, realistic fashion. It is worth noting, though, as McCloud does, that Japanese artists are increasingly developing more photorealistic styles in some cases.
[46] On this issue, see NATSUME Fusanosuke 夏目房之助 *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka* マンガはなぜ面白いのか [*Why is Manga Interesting?*] (Tokyo: NHK Raiburarii, 1997), 172—178.
[47] Natsume provides an intriguing look into the issue of closure [*yakusokugoto* 約束事] as well. See Natsume, *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka*, 80—96.
[48] Natsume, *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka*, 17—21; Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 25; Mark Wheeler MacWilliams, "Japanese Comic Books and Religion: Osamu Tezuka's Story of the Buddha," in Timothy J. Craig, ed. *Japan Pop!* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 117.
[49] See MOTOHIRO Katsuyuki 本広克行, "Komawari jitai ga kanpeki na e konte: kono mama toreba eiga ni naru!" コマ割り自体が完璧な絵コンテ—このまま撮れば映画になる！ [The Division of Frames itself forms a Perfect Pictorial Composition: If Shot As Is, it Becomes a Film!], in *AERA Comic: Nippon no manga* ニッポンのマンガ [*AERA Comic: Japanese Manga*] (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2007), 38—39.
[50] See Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse," 301—305. As she points out, Tezuka's influence cannot be denied, but other stylistic developments since should not be overlooked.
[51] Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 263.
[52] Ôtomo Katsuhiro dedicated his masterpiece *Akira* to Tezuka, and acclaimed artist Urasawa Naoki recently stated in a television interview that everybody should read *Hi no tori* at least once in his or her lifetime.
[53] Tezuka's depictions of Africans and American Indians, in particular, are stereotypical and even offensive by contemporary standards. Frederik Schodt has touched upon this problem in Tezuka's work in apologetic fashion (*Dreamland Japan*, 63—68). I generally agree with Schodt's assessment that Tezuka mimicked Disney and other Hollywood presentations of non-white ethnicities, although that begs the question of how Tezuka dealt with presentations of Asians in his work (his depictions of Taiwanese people in *Kirihito sanka*, for example, are not flattering). Either way, most *manga* artists through the 1980s relied on such stereotypes, and Japan's political correctness movement is latent at best. Still, recent publications of Tezuka's works include an apologetic afterword by the editorial staff, and one must definitely mention Tezuka's situation of the historical Buddha within the context of a rigid and unjust caste system. A number of other works also deal with problems of racial discrimination. Like many of his generation, Tezuka was aware of the problems of ethnic discrimination but lacked sufficient tools to overcome discriminatory depictions in his work—his highly iconic characters managed to embody stereotypes even more than he probably intended.
[54] On the religiosity of Tezuka's work, see Mark Wheeler MacWilliams, "Japanese Comic Books and Religion: Osamu Tezuka's Story of the Buddha," in Timothy J. Craig, ed. *Japan Pop!* (Armonk, N.Y.:

M.E. Sharpe, 2000); "Revisioning Japanese Religiosity: Osamu Tezuka's *Hi no tori* (The Phoenix)," in Timothy J. Craig and Richard King, eds. *Global Goes Local* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

[55] Natsume, *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka*, 66—96.

[56] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 113—114.

[57] Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 26.

[58] Natsume, *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka*, esp. 80—124.

[59] TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫, *Budda* ブッダ [*Buddha*], vol. 6 (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 1993), 246—247.

[60] HOSHINO Yukinobu 星野之宣, *Yamataika* ヤマタイカ, vols. 1—5 (Tokyo: Ushio Bijuaru Bunko, 1997). The English translation is from a recent reprint.

[61] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 35—45, esp. 43—45.

[62] FUNAZUKA Junko 船塚純子, *Dôgen-sama* 道元さま [*Dôgen*], found online at <http://www.sotozen-net.or.jp/>. Initially accessed 12 January 2008.

[63] Susan J. Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 10; Gilles Poitras, "Contemporary Anime in Japanese Pop Culture," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 62—63.

[64] Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), 21.

[65] I argue that part of the aesthetic and emotional appeal of recent films like *Waking Life* and *A Scanner Darkly* derives from the superimposition of animation on the actors and scenery. In both movies the near-reality of dreams and of drug-induced experience is visually emphasized by this layer of animation.

[66] Two recent *anime* that have played with this ability are *Tekkon kincriito* 鉄コン筋クリート (directed by Michael Arias, and based on the *manga* by Matsumoto Taiyô 松本大洋) and *Papurika* パプリカ (directed by Kon Satoshi 今敏, and based on the novel by science fiction author Tsutsui Yasutaka 筒井康隆). In both films, characters' internal states are portrayed in vivid detail, including dreams, daydreams, fantasies, and moments of crisis. See Michael Arias, dir. MATSUMOTO Taiyou 松本大洋, author, *Tekkon Kincriito* 鉄コン筋クリート (Tokyo: Shôgakukan, Aniplex, Asmik Ace, Beyond C, Dentsû, Tokyo MX, 2006); KON Satoshi 今敏, dir. TSUTSUI Yasutaka 筒井康隆, author, *Papurika* パプリカ (Tokyo: MADHOUSE/Sony Pictures Japan, 2006).

[67] George J. Tanabe, Jr. "Playing with Religion," in *Nova Religio* vol. 10, no.3, February 2007, 98.

[68] See S. Brent Plate, "Introduction," in S. Brent Plate, ed. *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 1.

[69] See, for example, Philip Gabriel, *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

[70] Additionally, *manga* and *anime* can be said to derive more directly from the visual-verbal forms of didactic entertainment such as *etoki* and *kamishibai* than novels and films by virtue of their emphasis on narrated or dramatized illustration (as opposed to drama or text alone, which also have a role in Japanese religious history—*setsuwa* 説話 and drama such as *nô* 能 are examples).

[71] See, for example, Robert M. Gimello, "Icon and Icantation: The Goddess Zhunti and the Role of Images in the Occult Buddhism of China," in Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, eds. *Images in Asian Religions: Text and Contexts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 225—256.

[72] On religions' use of visual symbols, see ISHII Kenji 石井研士, "Jôhôka to shûkyô" 情報化と宗教 [The Information Age and Religion]," in SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 and ISHII Kenji, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される＜宗教＞ [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 203.

[73] YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô" 現代日本の宗教 [Contemporary Japanese Religion]," in INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, ed. *Gendai nihon no shûkyô shakaigaku* 現代日本の宗教社会学 [*Sociology of Religion in Contemporary Japan*] (Tokyo: Sekaishisô Press, 1994), 94—130.

[74] See Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," 51.

[75] One example is Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan ス光光波世界神団, founded by *manga* artist Kuroda Minoru 黒田みのる. See YONEYAMA Yoshio 米山義男, "Subikari kôha sekai shindan: su no hikari to gekiga media" ス光光波世界神団—スの光と劇画メディア [Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan: The Light of Su and Graphic Novel Media], in SHIMIZU Masahito 清水雅人, ed. *Shinshûkyô jidai 3* 新宗教時代③ (Tokyo: Daizô shuppan, 1995), 53—95.

[76] See Inoue Nobutaka 井上順孝, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô: ushinawareta zahyôjiku* 若者と現代宗教—失われた座標軸 [Young People and Contemporary Religion: The Lost Coordinate Axis] (Chikuma Shinsho, 1999), 115—217. Theologian Tom Beaudoin has written about "irreverence" in relationship to the spiritual pursuits of Generation X, but I believe that his analysis is generally more descriptive of himself and his personal interpretations of popular culture than a genuine description of an entire generation and its spirituality. Nevertheless, Beaudoin's work was an impressive initial foray into the spirituality and/or religiosity of popular culture. See Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

[77] For a similar argument dealing with video games, see HIRAFUJI Kikuko 平藤喜久子, "Rôru pureingu gemu no naka no shinwagaku" ロールプレイングゲームの中の神話学 [Mythology in Role Playing Games], in Watanabe Naoki 渡邊直樹, ed. *Shûkyô to gendai ga wakaru hon 2007* 宗教と現代がわかる本 2007 [*The 2007 Guide to Religion and the Present*] (Tokyo: Heibonsha 2007), 168—171.

[78] This shift is well documented. For one example, see Stephen G. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進, "Sei no shôgyôka: shûkyô hôshi to zôyo no henyô" 聖の商業化—宗教奉仕と贈与の変容 [The Commercialization of the Sacred: The Transfiguration of Religious Service and Donation], in SHIMAZONO Susumu and ISHII Kenji 石井研士, eds. *Shôhi sareru <shûkyô>* [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 88—110; FUJIU Akira 藤生明 "Netto sanpai no kankangakugaku" ネット参拝の侃々諤々 [*Tensions Regarding Online Worship*], in *AERA* (Asahi Shinbun Extra Report and Analysis), vol. 20, no. 1. 1 January 2007, 31.

[79] Yoneyama, "Subikari kôha sekai shindan: su no hikari to gekiga media."

[80] Ishii, "Jôhôka to shûkyô,"185—208.

[81] Benjamin Dorman and Ian Reader, "Projections and Representations of Religion in Japanese Media," in *Nova Religio* vol. 10, no. 3, 2007, 8—11.

[82] Tanabe, "Playing with Religion," 97.

[83] See, for example, Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds. *Religion and Media* (Stanford: Standford University Press, 2001); Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, eds. *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); S. Brent Plate, ed. *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); John C. Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), Jolyon Mitchell and S. Brent Plate, eds. *The Religion and Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007); also see the special issue of *Nova Religio*, vol. 10, no. 3, February 2007.

[84] Tanabe, "Playing with Religion," 96. Tanabe's statement is not in conflict with the working definition of religion that I utilize in this piece; his definition arose out of a dialogue with my own work as well as the work of several others, and my refined working definition reflects my own dialogue with Tanabe's statement as cited here.

CHAPTER 2. CLASSIFYING RELIGIOUS *MANGA* AND *ANIME*

SUBCATEGORIES AND THEMES WITHIN RELIGIOUS *MANGA* CULTURE

Certain *manga* and *anime* are undoubtedly scriptural in orientation. They are created by religious groups based upon religious doctrine for the edification of the laity or current members. While some of these are created after a group has been founded—as in the case of Aum Shinrikyô's オウム真理教 *Metsubô no hi* 『滅亡の日』 [*Armaggedon*],[1] for example—some also start off as secular products that are gradually elevated to the status of scripture by fans (sometimes with the tacit or explicit acceptance of such status on the part of the author him- or herself). Clearly, in the cases of artists like Kuroda Minoru 黒田みのる and Yamamoto Sumika 山本鈴美香—*manga* artists who came to found new religions that were in turn largely based upon the *manga* fan base—the role of *manga* as a religious text akin to scripture is not in doubt.

Other *manga* develop religious themes within their stories, but utilize those themes more as entertainment devices for aesthetic purposes than as specific tools for moral edification or proselytization. When they are created particularly skillfully, some of these products encourage responses that are akin to religious responses (experiences of conversion or religious inspiration and accompanying changes in lifestyle or behavior, for example). The religious nature of these products, regardless of authorial intent, is often found in audience responses to their content, which in turn is presumably predicated on the degree to which individual audience members see themselves as part of a community of readers/viewers who have had similar experiences with the texts in question. Regardless of whether they are produced religiously, consumed religiously, or both, for

the purposes of this chapter it is helpful to remember that religious education, conversion, and persuasion generally include intellectual appeal alongside emotional impact, and that audiences of religions and of fiction are drawn to narratives that include both.[2]

Major Divisions

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to broadly divide the genre of religious *manga* and *anime* into didactic/pedagogical and aesthetic/affective types, recognizing that there will be overlap to some degree between the two (a point upon which I touch below).[3] Didactic products are those designed specifically to introduce audiences to religious information or information about religions, or to convert or instruct on religious doctrine. Aesthetic products, on the other hand, utilize religious vocabulary and imagery to promote affective responses (ranging from casual diversion to strong conviction) in their audiences first and foremost; sometimes these products incidentally give rise to religious sentiment or even practice. Both types rely heavily on narrative and image in accomplishing their respective ends; both also emphasize entertainment despite or alongside their pedagogical or aesthetic orientations.

Under the rubric of didactic products, I include those that take a stance similar to the academic study of religion, both through fictional and non-fictional approaches. I also include *manga* and *anime* that are designed to convert potential believers or instruct current adherents of a particular tradition, and products that are designed to engender religious (or at least anti-secular) nationalism in their audiences. Additionally, I include polemical products that aim to inculcate a certain attitude (including skepticism) towards religion or specific religions in their audiences. Under the rubric of aesthetic products, I include *manga* and *anime* that include religious vocabulary and imagery for aesthetic

purposes, occult products, and products that utilize narrative structures that resemble religious stories or that are otherwise significantly inspiring, inviting changes in behavior or belief. These various types can also be arranged upon a continuum in terms of audience response, from a lower level of religious commitment (boredom or mere diversion) to a higher one (belief, ritual practice, or significant changes in lifestyle or behavior).

Certainly all *manga* and *anime*, like other forms of fiction, could be said to be didactic or aesthetic in some way; my division of the two here does not dispute that fact. Rather, it is an attempt to talk about two interrelated aspects of religious instruction in terms of their functions: doctrinally based education aimed at inviting or deepening faith or belief, on the one hand, and emotionally oriented experiences of inspiration or amusement achieved through aesthetic pleasure, on the other.

Therefore a third term or category to describe the ways in which aesthetic and didactic elements overlap and interact in some *manga* and *anime* will help to clarify the relationship between the two. Here I will use the Japanese term *jôsô* 情操 to describe the dimension within the visual-verbal products of *manga* and *anime* that appeals to aesthetic/affective and intellectual/pedagogical aspects of cultural creation. *Jôsô* is simply translated as "sentiment" in some dictionaries, but a more precise definition found in the *Kôjien* comprehensive dictionary describes it as: "The complex and higher order of the various emotions attributed with cultural and social value such as ethics, the arts, and religion."[4] In my usage here, *jôsô* refers to heightened emotional response and accompanying refinements in intellectual or—occasionally—ethical or moral orientations.

Keeping this in mind, below I will use the category of "emotive *manga*" as a general translation of the term. Emotive *manga* educes or inculcates heightened religious sentiments or practice in the audience (faith, repetitive reading, exegesis), usually through the effectiveness of the storytelling, the persuasiveness of overt or implied arguments, and the emotional impact of the artwork. Conversely, compelling stories often make rhetorical or aesthetic use of existing (formal) religious thought, imagery, or narrative structures (e.g., myth, hagiography). Emotive *manga* therefore often gains some of its appeal from its reliance on narrative structures related—if only tangentially—to religious traditions, even as it lends itself to exegesis, canonization, and liturgical use.

In what follows, I look at didactic and aesthetic products in turn, tracing subcategories within each. I then point to some emotive *manga* that combine the qualities of the two. While I have used *manga* examples below, the same categories apply to *anime*.

RELIGIOUSLY AESTHETIC *MANGA*

Religious Vocabulary and Imagery **Manga**

One genre that enjoys a wide audience but that seems to have relatively low levels of transformative experience is *manga* that utilizes religious vocabulary and imagery without being explicitly religious or scriptural in orientation. These products tend to irreverently utilize themes from religious traditions around the world, or to remove religions like Buddhism from their institutional and doctrinal contexts in the service of adventure stories.

One example is Takei Hiroyuki's 武井宏之 *Butsuzôn* 『仏ゾーン』 [*Buddha Zone*].[5] The cover says, "When you see a Buddhist statue, think hero!" Senju, an avatar of the bodhisattva Kannon 観音 [Skt. Avalokitesvara], is dispatched to earth to look after Miroku 弥勒 [Skt. Maitreya] by "the king of the Buddhas," Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 [Skt. Mahavairocana]. Miroku is on earth living as a normal human, and Senju is to protect humans from injustice while guiding Miroku towards enlightenment. Along the way, Jizô 地蔵 [Skt. Krshtigarbha], the Seven Gods of Good Fortune [*shichifukujin* 七福神], and numerous other deities make appearances as well. Tension in the narrative primarily comes through Senju's battles with increasingly powerful foes, including other bodhisattvas.

Butsuzôn reflects Takei's somewhat ineffective attempt to create a comprehensive work out of the vast amount of information about Buddhism. The author seems unable to sufficiently "mask" the religious elements of his story—parts of the *manga* pedantically expound upon Buddhist cosmology, soteriology, and mythology (perhaps the reason for its cancellation by the publisher after a short run of only three volumes).[6] While it was still in serialization, Takei reverted to the occult themes of spirit possession and shamanism central to his longer-running and more popular work, *Shaaman Kingu* 『シャーマンキング』 [*Shaman King*][7] in efforts to salvage the story. Although *Butsuzôn* apparently had a committed fan base, and more than one thousand people

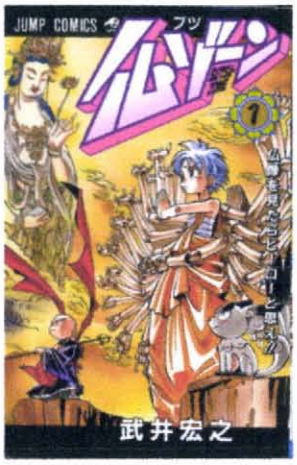

Figure 1: *Butsuzôn*

petitioned for the *manga* to be continued,[8] ultimately Takei seemed to recognize that shamanism gives off less religious "odor" than Buddhism.

Manga that utilize religious vocabulary and imagery as frames for a story thus walk a fine line between cavalier (and therefore entertaining) use of religious themes, and dogmatic (and therefore potentially boring) explications of religious history or doctrine. Overall, most religious vocabulary *manga* seem to prompt experiences of diversion without promoting lasting religious conviction or belief, or they prompt casual and temporary interest in religious information. Occult and spiritualist themes, while still arguably religious in orientation, are more likely to attract audiences than themes associated with established and well-known religions.

Occult Manga

Occult and spiritualist *manga*, which tends to focus most on the afterlife, ghosts, and horror themes, enjoys a wide audience. These products take up one of the largest shares of religious *manga* consumption in general, and liberally utilize information about the spirit world from various religious traditions. Occult and horror themes are particularly well-suited to presenting religious information while minimizing the "odor" of religion; stories of the afterlife and spirit possession still require some sort of exploration of religious views on the nature of the soul, ghosts, vengeful spirits [*onryô* 怨霊], and heaven and hell.

One example is *Teizokurei deidurîimu* 『低俗霊DAYDREAM』 [*Vulgar Spirit Daydream*], by Okuse Saki 奥瀬サキ and Meguro Sankichi 目黒三吉.[9] In the story, a teenage girl works as a *kuchiyoseya* 口寄せ屋 [spirit medium] when not working as a

dominatrix at an SM club in Tokyo. Her shamanic abilities help her to solve mysteries surrounding innocent people's deaths, and her personal daemon (a rope named Kinui that wraps itself around her body, looking like a piece of SM gear itself) protects her in dangerous situations. With its protagonist regularly depicted in all forms of undress or SM gear, and with the repetition of various themes regarding the undead, the series utilizes the perfect blend of sex, occultism, mystery stories, and violence to capture its audience.

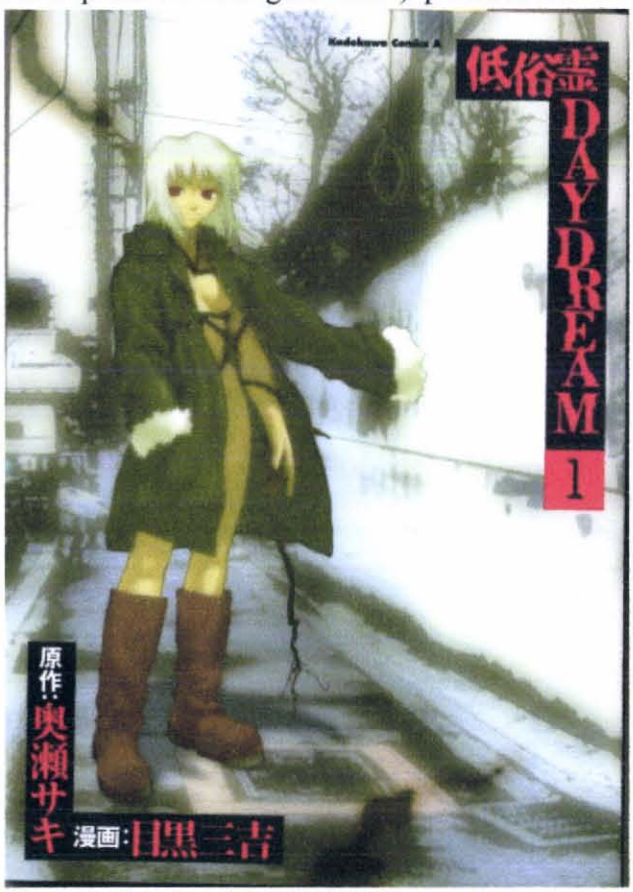

Figure 2: ***Teizokurei DAYDREAM***

Occult *manga* is widely read, and presumably reflects common perceptions of the afterlife even as it subtly influences people's views on the nature of ghosts and spirits. Like the wider horror genre itself, occult *manga* tends to have heavy doses of irrationalism and anti-secularism, and undoubtedly also serves as one source of information about cosmology and the supernatural, inviting casual interest associated with the thrill of horrific or eerie content. However, although this kind of *manga* draws upon religious traditions, it still seems less inclined to inviting strong emotional responses of the sort that lead to heightened religiosity.

DIDACTIC MANGA

Religious Studies Manga

This category of religious *manga* is not necessarily explicitly religious in orientation; rather, its content deals with religion from a perspective similar to that of the academic study of religion. There are *manga* that act as textbooks, describing differences between the various Buddhist sects, for example, or providing in-depth descriptions of the history and doctrine of each individual sect.[10] These types tend to be found in the "religion" section of bookstores and seem to be primarily oriented to adults who are casually curious about Buddhism or other religions.

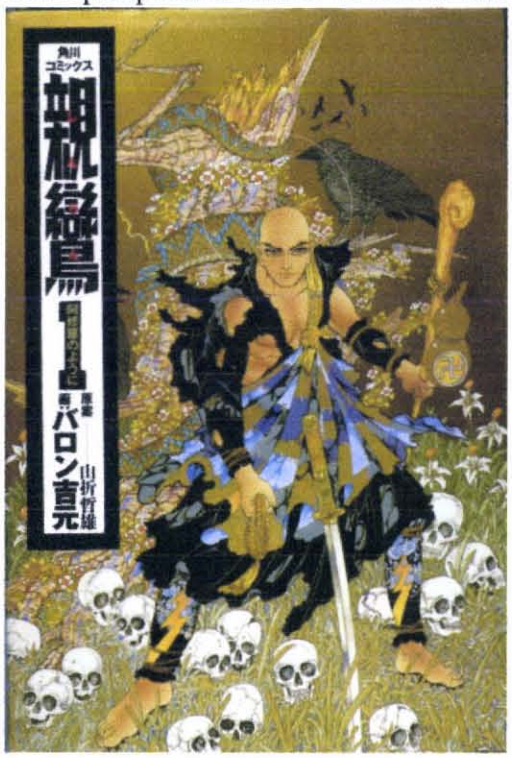

Figure 3: ***Shinran***

Among religious studies *manga,* some products are more narrative-driven and fictional than others. Prolific author on Buddhism, Hiro Sachiya ひろさちや, for example, has produced a *manga* series on various bodhisattvas,[11] and scholar of Buddhism Yamaori Tetsuo 山折哲夫 authored the text of a *manga* about Jôdo Shinshû founder Shinran 親鸞 (drawn by Baron Yoshimoto バロン吉元).[12] Audience responses to these works are presumably primarily intellectual (studying about religion), but certainly some of these works might help to invite or deepen faith or lead to increased ritual practice.

Polemical Manga

Related to the previous type are also *manga* that blend stories about fictive or actual religious groups with social commentary. Polemical *manga* include satire and critique, and especially since the Aum Shinrikyô sarin gas attacks in 1995, when religion as a social problem came to the fore in popular thought, many quite interesting works have been published dealing with the problem of cults. While the criticism leveled at religion or religions varies, these *manga* share the quality of arguing forcefully and sometimes persuasively for taking stances vis-à-vis specific religions and their adherents. These *manga* are the subject of Chapter Five.

***Anti-secular or Religiously Nationalistic* Manga**

Some *manga* make use of the persuasive power of the medium in the service of instilling religiously nationalistic attitudes in audiences. *Manga* artist Kobayashi Yoshinori 小林よしのり, for example, has written several *manga* that present ultranationalist and revisionist views of history, including denials of Japan's wartime atrocities.[13] Among these, Kobayashi's works *On War* 『戦争論』[14] and *On Yasukuni* 『靖国論』[15] both strongly assert Japanese innocence in the Pacific War, the purity of the Japanese people and their mission to "liberate Asia" (a euphemism for colonization), and the right—or even duty—of people to visit the controversial Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社, where several class A war criminals are deified along

Figure 4: ***Yasukuniron***

with millions of war dead (some of whom were deified there against their own wishes or the wishes of their survivors).

Kobayashi (who, incidentally, was raised in a Buddhist temple) is a master of his art, and makes full use of the visual-verbal rhetoric of *manga* to subtly promote sympathy with his views. Significantly, he sees his work as providing Japanese people with a moral basis for living in an areligious or morally vacuous society.[16] Kobayashi's work has clearly had an impact on discourse about Yasukuni Shrine and discussions of Japaneseness and Japanese history, and thus seems to have had a higher level of influence on its readership than some of the types of *manga* listed above. Some of his readers, for example, have decided to worship at Yasukuni after reading his work, and one of my survey respondents said that she developed interest in religion due to his influence.

***Religiously Propagandistic* Manga *and* Anime**

The various established religions of Japan have certainly recognized the instructional and inspirational power of *manga* and *anime*, and have attempted to build upon this by creating *manga* and *anime* mythologies, hagiographies, and other renditions of scripture. However, this kind of *manga* and *anime*, with its doctrinal focus, tends to be pedantic and sententious.[17] The artists who are commissioned to produce the work may not feel particularly inspired by the material, resulting in lackluster products. Furthermore, in some cases doctrinal restrictions lead to an inability to create products that are exciting to watch or read,[18] and as a result, *manga* created by religious institutions tends to have difficulty capturing a wide audience.[19]

The groups that have been most proactive in creating *manga* and *anime* have been the new new religions.[20] Aum Shinrikyô, the group responsible for the 1995 sarin gas

attack, had a division called its *manga* and *anime* team (MAT), where talented amateur artists produced a number of works based upon leader Asahara Shôkô's 麻原彰晃 sermons and doctrine.[21] More recently, Kôfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 (IRH) has produced volumes of *manga* and *anime* explicating the group's doctrine, including an *anime* film in 2006 called "The Laws of Eternity" 『永遠の法』, which used the highest standards of production and famous voice actors. Since it turned to the production of *manga* in 1992, nearly twenty percent of the group's publications have been *manga* or *anime*,[22] although it is difficult to determine whether this has contributed to growing membership in the group or increased public sympathy for its teachings.

Figure 5: ***The Laws of Eternity***

Occasionally, however, religious institutions appropriate works designed primarily for aesthetic or entertaining purposes as didactic texts—many temples keep copies of Tezuka Osamu's 手塚治虫 hagiography *Budda* 『ブッダ』 [*Buddha*] around for the edification of their younger members (and incidentally, this *manga* is published by Ushio Press, the publishing arm of Sôka Gakkai). Temples doubtless see the use of these secular products as a sort of "expedient means" (*hôben* 方便) for introducing young *danka* 檀家 members to Buddhist concepts, even if the products themselves are not historically or doctrinally accurate. When they do adopt these secular products, religious

groups implicitly emphasize the power of seemingly secular narrative to educe or inculcate religious sentiment.

EMOTIVE *MANGA*

One of the most fascinating, and ultimately most influential, types of religious *manga* is emotive *manga*, which tends to profoundly change audience members' worldviews or otherwise cause changes in behavior or belief. Whereas *manga* that use religious information for aesthetic purposes (to entertain or amuse) concomitantly expose audiences to religious information, and whereas didactic products aim at conversion or exhortation, emotive *manga* combines aesthetic and didactic elements in the service of creating stories designed to entertain, inspire, and—perhaps—persuade audiences. Emotive *manga* is thus often characterized by sponsoring changes in lifestyle, worldview, or behavior (sometimes quite similar to conversion) among audience members. Emotive *manga* is also often subjected to close exegesis, and tends to be casually canonized (classified as "must-read" or as a "cult classic"); sometimes fan groups or religions formally canonize emotive *manga* (as scripture or liturgical models).

Although often produced by lay artists who generally make no explicit claims to faith in a particular religion, these products nevertheless present stories that have a narrative structure similar to sacred literature (hagiographies, stories of apocalypse and salvation, cosmogonies, and epics featuring superhuman protagonists who display an impeccable morality). Audiences tend to treat these products as the most profound or life-changing among *manga* and *anime*, and they can be further subdivided into personally inspiring products (ones that prompt changes in outlook or behavior for individuals) and canonized products (works that are inducted into, or that form the canon

of, religious groups). For the purposes of this work I take the statements of readers or commentators as indicative of whether a particular *manga* should be counted as belonging to the emotive category.

Personally Inspiring Manga/Anime

One of the first widely read major emotive *manga* was probably Tezuka Osamu's *Hi no tori* 『火の鳥』, or *Phoenix.*[23] A masterpiece spanning millennia, *Hi no tori* utilizes the human quest for immortality to present a compound philosophical and cosmological picture of the interconnectedness of organisms, the cycle of karmic cause and effect, a cyclical view of history, and skepticism towards established religious institutions tempered by an examination of the problems of life and death that draws upon extant religious thought and themes.

Hi no tori is the story of an immortal bird that watches the development of human and other civilizations over eons. The bird is divine, in a sense—it has the ability to give life and take it, and to communicate directly to people telepathically. Tezuka's story shows both the foolishness and the wisdom of individual humans throughout history, from the most ancient times to the farthest future, in a cyclical view of existence that relies heavily on the concept of reincarnation. This concept is predicated on the notion that underlying and manifesting the entire universe is a fundamental life-force (called *cosmozone*, and written 宇宙生命 *uchû seimei*, literally, "universal life") to which people return when they die and from which all life springs. The Hi no tori herself is actually a sort of eternal manifestation of this life-force, capable of traveling between stars and between the dimensions of atoms and quarks to galaxies and universes.

The humans in *Hi no tori* are complex characters, and if they often have narrow, self-serving perspectives (many of them seek to kill the Hi no tori and drink her blood in order to gain immortality), it is mainly in light of the grander scheme that Tezuka draws. Some of his characters appear time and again in different incarnations throughout human history—the most ancient of these are stand-ins for the kami and divine humans of the *Kojiki* 『古事記』 mythology and the *Nihon shoki* 『日本書紀』 mythological history (Amaterasu 天照, Izanagi イザナギ, Sarutahiko 猿田彦, Himiko 卑弥呼). On the other end of the historical scale, Tezuka uses the science fiction genre to write a sort of "future history" by allowing his characters to deal with the limits of science and technology and the meaning of being human in a technologically advanced civilization.

One of the most praised works in *manga* history, *Hi no tori* reflects the philosophy and pedagogical intent of a *manga* master. It has been canonized as a "must-read" by audiences and other artists, and a number of my Japanese acquaintances have mentioned in casual conversation that *Hi no tori* changed their worldviews. One interviewee mentioned that *Hi no tori* did not initially appeal to him as an adolescent, but that when he rediscovered it in his early adulthood he found that the *manga* held many worthwhile lessons for him, including Tezuka's statement near the end of the series that all religions are essentially oriented towards the same goals.[24] The religiosity of *Hi no tori* has also been the subject of some academic attention.[25]

Due to his ability to create such inspiring stories, Tezuka has been revered as the "god of *manga*" both in life and posthumously. The canonization of works like *Hi no tori*, however, remains at the level of critical acclaim—to my knowledge it has not been

included in the scriptural or liturgical canon of any religious group (although commentator Kageyama Tamio 景山民夫, a prominent member of Kôfuku no Kagaku, calls Tezuka a "bodhisattva" in the afterword to one of the volumes of *Hi no tori*).[26] As I mentioned above, however, some Buddhist groups have apparently semi-officially canonized another of Tezuka's works (*Budda*), since they make the *manga* available to their parishioners[27] (although Tezuka stated that some Buddhists reacted quite negatively to *Budda* because of his cavalier reinterpretation of the historical Buddha's hagiography).[28] The Tezuka estate has also published a volume entitled *Tezuka Osamu no "Budda": Sukuwareru kotoba* 『手塚治虫のブッダ——救われる言葉』 [*The Budda of Tezuka Osamu—Words of Salvation*]; the subtitle suggests that Tezuka's work retains soteriological efficacy similar to that of the Buddhist canon.

Canonized Manga

Some *manga* do indeed become canonized as part of the formal canon of a particular religion. In a few cases, this happens when the *manga* artist him- or herself capitalizes on or capitulates to celebrity and takes on the role of a religious leader. The power of literature and media to inspire and instruct comes to be tied to the charismatic authority of the creator of that media—*manga* artists thus effectively or actually become leaders of new religious movements.

One example is Miuchi Suzue 美内すずえ, who is famed for her *manga Garasu no kamen* 『カラスの仮面』 [*Glass Mask*],[29] and whose work *Yôkihi den* 『妖鬼妃伝』 [*Tale of the Demonic Princess*][30] won a prestigious award in 1982. Miuchi's profile on her website states:

> In *Amaterasu* 『アマテラス』, a spectacular romance of light and dark published by Kadokawa Shoten, [Miuchi] included her own mystical experiences; as a piece of literature with a powerful message this work boasts a large number of devoted fans from all walks of life. Also learned in the spiritual world [*seishin sekai* 精神世界], ... Miuchi is vigorously active [in spirituality culture].[31]

Miuchi's fan groups are not formally religious, but the author's incorporation of mystical themes in her works and her "spiritual world" activities such as tours to Tenkawa Benzaiten Shrine 天河弁財天社 bring them close.[32]

One example of more formal canonization is the *manga* of Yamamoto Sumika. Yamamoto is perhaps best known for her tennis *manga*, *Eesu o nerae!* 『エースを狙え！』 [*Aim for the Ace!*].[33] The *manga* gradually moved away from its original plot as Yamamoto increasingly incorporated her own prophecies and thoughts on religion, and eventually a portion of Yamamoto's audience established a religious community around her.[34]

The group, called Shinzankai 神山会 [Holy Mountain Society], maintains a communal lifestyle at "Yamamoto Farm 山本ファーム" in Yamanashi Prefecture,[35] and generally shuns contact with the outside world, thus making it difficult to obtain information on Yamamoto's activities as a religious leader. However, it seems that Yamamoto acts in a shamanic capacity, performing semi-regular meetings wherein she is temporarily possessed and delivers oracles.[36] The legal incorporation of Shinzankai as a religious juridical person illustrates the power of the *manga* medium to transform imagined communities (Yamamoto's intended audience and the actual audience's perception of itself as a community of people with shared ideals) into actual ones.

CONCLUSIONS

Audiences need not recognize a narrative as *formally* religious for it to serve a religious function. Narrative need not be characterized as doctrine to have a religious effect. Religious groups might use *manga* and *anime* to convert or instruct, but just as often lay artists produce these media for playful and pecuniary purposes, utilizing religious imagery and ideas to enrich their stories.

When considered in terms of their effects as opposed to their content, popular fiction and sacred story are only different in the degree of their formalization as part of any specific religious tradition. Religious narratives are not particularly exceptional or outstanding except for the fact that they explicitly admit to being sacred; canonization and ritual practice (in production and consumption) inhere in popular fiction as well. Both deal with the ultimate problems of existence (life and death, the creation and destruction of the world, moral behavior), and both imagine any number of possible realms and characters who exacerbate or contribute to the solution of those problems. In the process, they create and recreate themselves through one another: religious narratives are maintained within fiction even as fiction draws upon religious ideas.

NOTES

[1] ASAHARA Shôkô 麻原彰晃, draft, with the "Star of David" ダビデの星 as illustrator, *Metsubô no hi: Asahara Shôkô, 'Yohane no mokujiroku' no fûin wo toku!!* 滅亡の日—麻原彰晃、「ヨハネの黙示録」の封印を解く!! [*Armaggedon: Asahara Shôkô Opens the Seal on John's "Book of Revelation!!*] (Tokyo: Aum Press, 1989).

[2] Recall McCloud's definition of comics from the previous chapter, which emphasized both conveying information and eliciting aesthetic response.

[3] This chapter borrows from an earlier (1996) typology of religious *manga* created by scholar of religion and media Yamanaka Hiroshi 山中弘, but makes some modifications to that typology in light of recent developments in *manga* culture; it also attempts to correct for some problems associated with differences in the ways texts are produced and used, problems that are associated with the motivations of the producers and users involved. See YAMANAKA Hiroshi 山中弘, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô" マンガ文化の中の宗教 [Religion in *Manga* Culture], in SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 and ISHII Kenji 石井研士, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される<宗教> [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 159—161.

[4] *Kôjien* electronic dictionary, translation mine. *Jôsô* features in current debates about religion in public education, where the phrase *shûkyô jôsô kyôiku* 宗教情操教育 refers to the cultivation of religious and moral sentiment in students.

[5] TAKEI Hiroyuki 武井宏之, *Butsuzôn* 仏ゾーン [*Buddha-zone*], vols. 1—3 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1997).

[6] Takei, *Butsuzôn*, vol. 3 "Afterword," 190—191.

[7] Takei Hiroyuki, *Shaman Kingu* シャーマン・キング [*Shaman King*], vol. 1 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1998).

[8] Takei, *Butsuzôn*, vol. 3 "Afterword," 191.

[9] OKUSE Saki 奥瀬サキ and MEGURO Sankichi 目黒三吉, *Teizokurei DAYDREAM* 低俗霊 DAYDREAM [*Vulgar Spirit Daydream*], vols. 1—6 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comics A, Kadokawa Shoten, 2001—2004).

[10] See, for example, TADA Kazuo 多田一夫 and Takujinsha 拓人社, *Manga de satoru Nihon no bukkyô to kaisotachi* マンガで悟る日本の仏教&開祖たち [*Enlightenment Through* Manga: *Japanese Buddhism and its Founders*] (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2005).

[11] HIRO SACHIYA ひろさちや, TATSUMI Yoshihiro 辰巳ヨシヒロ, *Dainichi nyorai: uchû no hotoke* 大日如来—宇宙のほとけ [*Dainichi Nyorai: Buddha of the Universe*] (Tokyo: Suzuki Shuppan, 1992); HIRO SACHIYA ひろさちや, KOSHIRO Takeshi 古城武司, *Miroku bosatsu: mirai no hotoke* 弥勒菩薩—未来のほとけ [*Miroku Bosatsu: The Future Buddha*] (Tokyo: Suzuki Shuppan, 1994).

[12] BARON Yoshimoto バロン吉元 and YAMAORI Tetsuo 山折哲夫, *Shinran* 親鸞 [*Shinran*], vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comikkusu, 1990).

[13] Kobayashi was formerly a prominent member of the Society for Textbook Reform, which pushed for the publication of the controversial textbooks that gloss over Japan's wartime atrocities and have given rise to anti-Japan sentiment in Korea and China.

[14] KOBAYASHI Yoshinori 小林よしのり, *Sensôron* 戦争論 [*On War*] (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 1998).

[15] KOBAYASHI Yoshinori, *Yasukuniron* 靖国論 [*On Yasukuni*] (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 2005).

[16] WATANABE Naoki 渡邊直樹, Kobayashi Yoshinori Interview, *Shûkyô to gendai ga wakaru hon 2007* 宗教と現代がわかる本 2007 [*The 2007 Guide to Religion and the Present*] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2007), 66—77.

[17] ISHII Kenji 石井研士, "Jôhôka to shûkyô" 情報化と宗教 [The Information Age and Religion], in SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 and ISHII Kenji, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される<宗教> [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 203.

[18] See OKADA Toshio 岡田斗司夫, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka? moto oumu animeetaa no kokuhaku" フィルムは生きているか？ 元オウム・アニメーターの告白 [Is Film Living? Confessions of a Former Aum Animator]," in *Quick Japan*, vol. 3, 1997, 207—213.

[19] The fact that a large number of the *manga* dealt with in Kitahara Naohiko's book *Manga That Are Not in Bookstores* are religious speaks volumes. The book devotes one chapter to "religious *manga*" in general, another chapter to *manga* created by the group Cosmomate [Worldmate], and a section of another chapter to Sôka Gakkai's apologetic *manga*. See KITAHARA Naohiko 北原尚彦, *Honya ni wa nai manga* 本屋にはないマンガ [*Manga That Are Not in Bookstores*]. (Tokyo: Nagasaki Publishing, 2005), 87—149, 64—67.

[20] Kitahara, *Honya ni wa nai manga*, 87.

[21] See Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 228—232; also Okada, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka?" 202—213.

[22] Thanks to Tsukada Hotaka, a colleague and mentor at the University of Tokyo, for the statistics on IRH publications.

[23] TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫, *Hi no tori* 火の鳥 [*Phoenix*], vols. 1—13 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1993).

[24] Interview with Kurosaki Shin (a pseudonym), 26 July 2007.

[25] Mark MacWilliams, "Revisioning Japanese Religiosity: Osamu Tezuka's *Hi no tori* (The Phoenix)," in Timothy J. Craig and Richard King, eds. *Global Goes Local*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

[26] KAGEYAMA Tamio 景山民夫, "Kaisetsu" 解説 [Commentary], in TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫, *Hi no tori* 火の鳥 [*Phoenix*], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 1992), 284—287.

[27] One of my interviewees, for example, mentioned that her family temple kept copies of the *manga* around, and this was her introduction to Tezuka's work.

[28] TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫, cited in *Tezuka Osamu no "Budda": Sukuwareru kotoba* 手塚治虫のブッダ——救われる言葉 [*The* Budda *of Tezuka Osamu—Words of Salvation*] (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1994), 6.

[29] MIUCHI Suzue 美内すずえ, *Garasu no kamen* ガラスの仮面 [*Glass Mask*] (Tokyo: Hakusensha Bunko, 1994).

[30] MIUCHI Suzue 美内すずえ, *Yôkihi den* 妖鬼妃伝 [*Tale of the Demonic Princess*] (Tokyo: Hakusensha Bunko, 1995).

[31] See Miuchi's website: <http://homepage2.nifty.com/suzu/profile/profile_top.htm>. Initially accessed 29 November 2007.

[32] See Shimazono Susumu 島薗進, *Supirichuariti no kôryû: shinreisei bunka to sono shûhen* スピリチュアリティの興隆—新霊性文化とその周辺 [*The Rise of Spirituality: New Spirituality Culture and its Periphery*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007), 43. Dr. Shimazono also mentioned to me in person that Miuchi regularly leads tour groups to "power spots" like Tenkawa Benzaiten Shrine 天河弁財天社 as a quasi-religious leader.

[33] YAMAMOTO Sumika, *Eesu o nerae!* エースを狙え！ [*Aim for the Ace!*], vols. 1—10 (Shûeisha, 2002).

[34] Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 162.

[35] The group maintains a website, although there is no explicit mention of religion on the site. See <http://www.cosmo.ne.jp/~masashi/farm/index.html>. Initially accessed 8 January 2007. Yamamoto seems to have abandoned her career as a *manga* artist shortly after establishing the group. The group is isolationist and refused a request for an interview.

[36] See, however, the following website: <http://www002.upp.so-net.ne.jp/soo/text11.html>. Initially accessed 8 January 2007. Thanks to Dr. Erica Baffelli of Otago University for the link.

CHAPTER 3. RECREATING RELIGION

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS *MANGA* CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

The concept of "recreating religion" came to me when a professor once lamented to me that *manga* and *anime* are becoming young people's primary source of information about Shinto, but that so much of the information is so *wrong*.[1] This type of statement, closely linked to theories of degeneration and decline, overlooks the fact that redaction and reinterpretation have been an integral part of the history and development of the world's various religions. Complaints that the depictions of religion found in *manga* culture undermine traditional religious culture or authority are understandable and valid, but they are predicated upon the spurious assumption that religions are static entities that do not undergo continuous reinterpretation. Any generation necessarily recreates religion, and the vested interests of that generation become apparent in its interpretations of religious doctrine and practice and accompanying narratives, both within and about the tradition. The deployment of religious themes for diversion and the mobilization of entertainment media for religious instruction and inspiration are not at all new, but in these processes we find some of the most cogent examples of how religion is "re-created" while people "recreate."

"Recreation" is one of the many delightful words in the English language that retains two meanings that are distinguishable only through the slightest change in pronunciation. I call attention to this term here in order to highlight what I perceive as two complementary tendencies at work in religious *manga* culture. The first of these is the amusing element of religion as it is manifest in popular media. Religion is entertaining; media make it more so. Religion is imaginative; so are fictional media. The

second tendency is the creative element that comes through *mediating* religion—as media utilize religious information for entertaining, pecuniary, or whimsical purposes, that information is transformed by the media in question. Religions may certainly utilize media for the dissemination of doctrine, but media just as easily utilize the narrative and cultural wealth of religions in the service of creating entertaining stories (and exempla gratia abound: the *Indiana Jones* series, *The DaVinci Code*).

"Recreating religion" therefore refers to the process of utilizing religious themes in the service of creating entertaining media products or to the process of altering—intentionally or unintentionally—religious information itself, and might thus be seen as the fusion of the aesthetic and didactic elements of religion discussed in the previous chapter. When established religious groups make use of media other than traditional canonical texts to present their formal doctrines, the change in media form inexorably leads to a change in content or—at the very least—interpretation. Similarly, when media borrows from the extant religious tradition in the service of making an entertaining story or scoop, the primary interests of the producer (making art, making money, entertaining an audience, transmitting a message, educating, and so forth) filter the religious information involved. In the case of *manga* culture, religions may use *manga*, but they are often used by *manga* as well. Allegiance to tradition or to a specific ritual or doctrinal lineage is not a prerequisite for participation in the production and consumption of religious thought.

Manga culture thus provides a particularly provocative example of the recreation of religion that takes place within contemporary Japan. With its ability to mobilize both images and text in rhetorically effective and aesthetically emotive ways, and its location

in the marketplace rather than under the purview of a particular religious institution, religious *manga* and its associated *anime* is a powerful tool that can create, change, and challenge people's religious beliefs and/or views about religion. Readers of some types of *manga* are awash in information about religion—it is no surprise then that some of them would take profound messages from these products, and that in certain cases *manga* or *anime* might form the basis for changes in personal lifestyles, be subjected to close exegesis, provide foundations for individualized or group ritual behavior, or become canonized as scripture for a particular religious institution.

This chapter looks at four main ways in which the recreation of religion occurs through *manga* and/or *anime*. Namely, it examines ways in which: 1) *manga* or *anime* serves as a source of religious information or information about religions; 2) *manga* and *anime* leads to changes in lifestyles for certain individuals, including conversion; 3) *manga* and *anime* becomes a site or model for ritual practice; and 4) *manga* and *anime* comes to be canonized as scripture by fan groups or formal religions. These ways of recreating religion exist on a continuum characterized by the aesthetic, didactic, and emotive elements of religious *manga* culture traced in the previous chapter.

Monzen no kozô narawanu kyô wo yomu: Exposure to Religious Information

The proverb "*monzen no kozô narawanu kyô wo yomu*" 門前の小僧習わぬ経を読む literally means "the child in front of the temple gate reads sutras without having been taught." It is generally used in Japan to refer to people picking things up by being in the right environment, and no longer has any particular religious association. In the present discussion, however, it seems appropriate for describing the religious knowledge

that some Japanese people are able to extract from the entertainment media around them.[2]

For example, Hirafuji Kikuko 平藤喜久子 has demonstrated that young Japanese people who have experience with video games that deploy mythological content tend to have higher levels of awareness of mythological terms (such as deities' names) than those who do not play such games. Yet these terms are certainly not unadulterated—Hirafuji argues that video games are in the process of creating eclectic new "hyper-mythologies"[3] that the game players absorb, contributing to young people's knowledge of traditional religious information even as they change traditional mythologies for ludic and pecuniary purposes.[4] As Hirafuji suggests, the same process occurs within *manga* culture.[5]

The base of extant mythological and religious information, rich in characters, concepts, and narrative structures that attract audiences, forms a palimpsest upon which new articulations of myths or their characters are inscribed and re-inscribed through various entertainment media. Privately produced products largely escape censure from formal religious institutions, but they do not eliminate religion—they just appropriate it for their own purposes.[6]

In some cases, casual uses of religious terminology and imagery in popular media can actually be seen as *maintaining* religious information in the imaginations of their audiences. Consider, for example, the following two passages. The first is an entry from the Encyclopedia of Shinto, a scholarly-reviewed authoritative text produced by the Institute for the Study of Japanese Culture and Classics at Kokugakuin University describing a rather obscure element of Shinto theology:

> According to Shinto doctrine, the spirit (*reikon*) of both *kami* and human beings is made up of one spirit and four souls [*ichirei shikon*]. The spirit is called *naobi*, and the four souls are the turbulent (*aramitama*), the tranquil

(*nigimitama*), the propitious (*sakimitama*) and the wondrous, miraculous, or salubrious (*kushimitama*).[7]

In contrast, the following passage taken from a fan website of the *manga/anime* series *Inuyasha* 『犬夜叉』 [*Dog-Spirit*][8] indicates how concepts removed from their original contexts can be shifted to match authors' and consumers' desires even as they maintain religious information:

> The reason this jewel is called the sheikon [probably a misreading of *shikon*, or four souls] jewel is that sheikon means four souls and along time ago there was a priestess battling all sorts of demons at once and she had the power to purify demon souls rendering them harmless, but then one demon got its fang in her chest out of there came the jewel of four souls and the names of the four souls are aramitama, nigimitama, kushimitama, and sakimitama, aramitama was courage, nigimitama was friendship, kushimitama was wisdom, and sakimitama was love, when combined as one soul they are called nyobi and there is still a battle going on inside the jewel of four souls.[9]

The transition of turbulent to courageous, tranquil to friendly, propitious or felicitous to love, and miraculous or salubrious to wisdom—as well as the shifts in pronunciation and orthography—suggests a substantial difference in the ways the audience of the Encyclopedia of Shinto and the audience of *Inuyasha* understand these concepts. Yet whatever the motivations of the producers or consumers of these *manga* (profit, entertainment, education, titillation), these terms seep into consumers' consciousness.

However, it is difficult to gauge the degree to which this occurs in any significant fashion. A small minority of my survey respondents—between seven and eight percent—claimed that reading *manga* or watching *anime* contributed to their interest in religion or in a specific deity or religious figure, and some of these people named works

like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* [*Shinseiki ebuangerion* 『新世紀エヴァンゲリオン』],[10] *On Yasukuni* [*Yasukuniron* 『靖国論』],[11] and *Shaman King* [*Shaaman Kingu* 『シャーマンキング』][12] as examples. Considering the fact that few people admit to interest in religion, however, I find it significant that many respondents—nearly 75 percent—reacted positively to the idea of lay artists utilizing religious themes in their stories: 32.2 percent of respondents said such usage was "a good thing" [*ii to omou* いいと思う], and 41.4 percent of respondents said that "given the choice, I would say it's a good thing" [*dochira ka to ieba ii to omou* どちらかといえばいいと思う]. I interpret these positive responses as affirmations of the appeal of religious information outside of dogmatic contexts, particularly when contrasting these responses with the responses to the question about whether the students felt that religious groups should proselytize through *manga*: 47.1 percent said the prospect made them somewhat or rather uncomfortable [*warui to omou* 悪いと思う; *dochira ka to ieba warui to omou* どちらかといえば悪いと思う], and only 10.3 percent of the respondents felt that such proselytization was definitely a good thing [*ii to omou* いいと思う].[13]

Manga as Catalyst for Self-Reflection or as Impetus for Conversion

Some entertainment media such as *manga* and *anime* will elicit affective responses to their content due to their abilities to utilize religious vocabulary and imagery in rhetorically effective fashions. These responses will of course vary according to the content in question, the audience involved, the skill of the artist(s), and the nature of fans'

interpretations. As my informant Satô Kenji* mentioned to me in an interview, some *manga* can provide guidance on how to lead one's life, or at least opportunities for reflection. Satô mentioned that Inoue Takehiko's 井上武彦 long-running and widely-read *manga Bagabondo* 『バガボンド』 [*Vagabond*],[14] the story of legendary swordsman Miyamoto Musashi 宮本武蔵,[15] has served such a function for him, a sentiment echoed by another informant (Kurosawa Shin,* a friend of Satô's). A total of 55.1 percent of my college age survey respondents said that they had had inspiring, fulfilling, or transcendent experiences reading *manga* or watching *anime*, and among the products they named as examples were Miyazaki Hayao's oeuvre, *Akira*, *Dragonball*, *Nana*, and *Slam Dunk*.[16]

Occasionally these media may also directly or indirectly influence some people to join religious groups. Apparently a number of people who read *manga* that valorize the thaumaturgical abilities of esoteric priests have decided to take the tonsure based on the visions of esoteric Buddhism they have absorbed from these works. Many people, for example, seem to have become priests due to the influence of *Kujakuô* 『孔雀王』 [*Peacock King*],[17] the story of a Shingon 真言宗 priest who performs exorcisms of increasingly powerful demons and takes the side of humanity in grandiose battles against the forces of evil.[18] As one Shingon priest and *manga* enthusiast sheepishly confessed to me: "I thought that if I studied esoteric Buddhism I could obtain supernatural powers."[19]

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* A pseudonym
* A pseudonym

"Thank You, Sailor Moon": Ritual Responses to Manga Culture

Even without formal conversion, some fans demonstrate ritual responses to content in *manga* and/or *anime* that they perceive to be particularly entertaining or inspiring. The vicarious experience of the *manga* or *anime* world achieves a new dimension in *cosupure* コスプレ (a Japanese abbreviation of the English phrase "costume play") practice, where fans temporarily don the personality of a favorite *manga* or *anime* character through costuming and reenactment.[20]

I hesitate to say that cosplay is a specifically *religious* act—most cosplayers would probably take affront at such an indication. I do suggest, however, that it is a ritualized act that is part of the culture of reading *manga* and watching *anime* for some fans, and that scholars of religion should examine these media-centric ritualized behaviors to see what implications they hold for how fans might imitate gestures and attitudes found in products that casually deploy religious themes. The relationship between media and religion (mediating religion and sanctifying media) includes instances where gestures in media become models for ritual activity.[21]

The *ema* 絵馬 propitiatory tablet photographed below[22] brings to mind one example of religious sentiment and ritualized action—including cosplay—arising from the fictional world of *manga* and *anime*. Taken at Meiji Jingû (a famous shrine in the Tokyo area), it reads: "Thank you, Sailor Moon." The anonymous author of this tablet hung it at an established religious institution, but the message of thanks is directed towards a fictional *manga* and *anime* series rather than towards a *kami*.

In fact, Hikawa Jinja 氷川神社, the shrine that is the model for a homophonous shrine (Hikawa Jinja 火川神社) that features in the *Sailor Moon* 『セーラームーン』 series has become the focus of fans' religious devotion. Fans have increased the number of religious visits to the shrine, which previously only drew a few hundred worshippers during the New Year shrine-visiting season (*hatsumôde* 初詣). These new worshippers include male fans dressed as their favorite female protagonists, and fans have also taken to providing their own specialized *Sailor Moon ema* to record their petitions to the enshrined deities.[23]

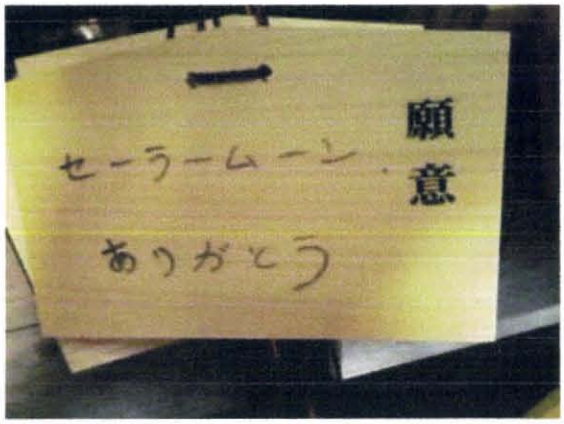

Figure 6: Thank you, Sailor Moon*

In a similar ritual response to fictional worlds, my informant Satô Kenji recalled how the death of a major character during the serialization of *Ashita no Jô* 『明日のジョー』 [*Joe Tomorrow*] led distraught fans to hold an actual funeral in his honor.[24] Some people also talk about a particular *manga* as having changed their outlook on the world to the point of prompting ritual action, as in the case of a young man who chose to worship at the controversial Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社, where several Class A war criminals are deified along with thousands of other war dead, after reading Kobayashi Yoshinori's 小林よしのり *manga*.[25] In this way, the boundary between the fictional world of *manga*

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* Photo courtesy of Jesse LeFebvre, taken at Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, 15 April 2006.

and the real world of fans' shared experience come to overlap, often through ritualized action.

CANONIZATION

There is historical precedent for popular fiction leading to the creation of new forms of religious belief and practice. When they are particularly emotively and rhetorically effective (attracting and inspiring a wide audience), or as they gradually acquire the mystique and charisma of hoary tradition over time (impressing themselves upon younger generations), popular literature, drama, and film move from their position as "mere pop" to "high culture."[26] Along the way, the characters and themes within these works come to take on a life of their own, sometimes becoming objects of devotion or models to be emulated. This in turn leads to detailed exegesis of the content, repetition of dialogue or reenactment of scenes in a liturgical fashion, and proselytization through recommending the content to other potential audience members. There is, in other words, most definitely a reason why certain films and books are called "cult classics."

As fans gather around works that they find particularly appealing or inspiring, they may make reading these *manga* or watching these *anime* a ritualized endeavor for fan clubs; they may also perform exegetical readings of these products in the fashion of scriptural study groups. As these products—presumably created solely for entertainment—gradually become the objects of this exegetical practice, they take on a greater scriptural character. In the rare cases where the producer of the work also has interest in being a religious leader, the transition from a secular piece of entertainment to a scriptural work is accompanied by the formal canonization of the work in question and—possibly—the creation of a new religion. Indeed, there are examples of *manga*

serving as a gathering point for like-minded individuals, transforming into scripture, and giving birth to new religions.

Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan

One such example is Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan ス光光波世界神団 [Divine Corps of the World of the Lightwaves of Su] (SKSS hereafter), a group headed by *manga* artist Kuroda Minoru 黒田みのる. Kuroda's occult *manga* gradually took on the character of scripture as his fan community displayed strong attraction to the ideas within his works and as the author himself experimented with information from the extant religious traditions around him. Eventually Kuroda founded SKSS, which is based on the reading of his works as well as practices very similar to those found in religions in the Mahikari lineage.[27] Tsushiro Hirofumi 津城寛文 suggests that the SKSS membership is largely derived from Kuroda's fan base, and that the usage of *manga*, as well as of video and other technology, has led to the group's success in gaining converts, particularly young people who are steeped in the *manga* medium.[28]

I met with Kuroda three times—once in April of 2007 at his home in Kôbe, again during one of his regular visits to Honolulu in December of the same year, and a third time in March of 2008, again in Honolulu. I asked a number of questions about his spiritual views (he has strong antipathy to the word "religion," and is similarly disappointed in science) and about how his career as a *manga* artist had influenced and reflected his outlook on the nature of the soul and the afterlife. Kuroda's *manga* tends to be classified as occult or horror *manga* (and he says that he was one of the first to draw such works), but he himself seems to think of it more as an honest explanation of the

makeup of the spirit and the structure of the cosmos. Kuroda emphasized, however, that although his *manga* might reflect his interest in what he calls the "principles" of the universe, he intentionally downplayed his teachings in the *manga* so that it would not be too dogmatic. His interest in writing *manga* arose, as he put it, from a desire to eat—Kuroda fell into his job as a *manga* artist rather than seeking it out. Aside from his numerous horror and girls' *manga*, Kuroda has written a series of books that are primarily text-based but that also include illustrations drawn by his staff and excerpts from his earlier works.[29] He no longer writes *manga* due to problems with his eyesight, although he has a strong desire to spread his knowledge of what he refers to as the "principles" (*hôsoku* 法則) of the unseen world to as many people as possible.

Kuroda was born in Tokyo in 1928, and spent the first several years of his life moving from town to town because his father was a military officer. When he was young he had several mystical or otherwise mysterious experiences. For example, when he was a teenager he spent a night in a temple, and saw a human figure floating in the air above his head. Several years before becoming a *manga* artist Kuroda had discovered the writings of Asano Wasaburô 浅野和三郎, an early twentieth century intellectual who had conducted experiments on communicating with the ghosts of the dead.[30] Kuroda was fascinated to discover that figures like Asano had been conducting experiments on the spiritual world in the early twentieth century. This reinforced his own belief that science was limited; Kuroda had felt no particular attraction to religion since his youth.

After withdrawing from Chûô University, Kuroda was looking for work and landed a job through an acquaintance, writing girls' *manga* for one of the larger

publishing houses (Kôdansha). Kuroda claims that he had little interest in drawing *manga*, particularly girls' *manga*, and was constantly pushing the envelope of what could be drawn. His long-standing intellectual interest in the unseen world at the boundaries of both religion and science was what he really wanted to draw, and these themes eventually found their way into his works. His exploration of the spirit world was partially manifested in the horror *manga* that he was writing in the 1960s, especially a three-part series about the "ghost world, spirit world, and heaven" [*yûkai* 幽界, *reikai* 霊界, *shinkai* 神界], and he said that eventually he got invitations from nearly fifty different religious groups to visit them.

In the early 1970s Kuroda encountered Mahikari 真光, and he studied under leader Okada Kôtama 岡田光玉,[31] who apparently said to him: "at last we finally met [*yatto aemashita ne* やっと会えましたね]." Kuroda told me that he was impressed to see an actual religious group truly interested in studying or researching the unseen world in a fashion that was superscientific and yet methodical. He continued to study under Okada until the leader's death, after which he had a revelatory experience and decided to found his own religious group.[32]

Kuroda's *manga* was quite successful during the 1970s, but he refused to follow the popular trend of writing long-running serializations focused on one lovable protagonist; he chose instead to use each individual *manga* as a vehicle to teach readers about a particular aspect of what he calls "the unseen world." He describes these works as *etoki* 絵解き, explanations supplemented with pictures. He mentioned that often he had to include detailed commentary in the margins of his works to fully instruct his

readers, a practice that drew some criticism. Many people, however, seemed to be attracted to the content. As his *manga* continued to reflect his views on the afterlife, the makeup of the soul, and a decidedly Mahikari-influenced cosmogony/cosmology, Kuroda developed a fan community that incorporated as a religion in 1980, taking the current name in 1984. The group is based in Tokyo's Hachiôji. Kuroda says that forming a religion was the most efficient way of spreading his knowledge of the unseen world.

The current incarnation of Kuroda's group has two segments. The fan-oriented portion of the group is known as Ai 200 Tomo no Kai アイ200友の会, and is basically a source of information about Kuroda and his teachings on what he calls "the unseen world." The other portion of the group is the legal body of SKSS, and although the group's literature downplays its legal status as a religion and emphasizes Kuroda's teachings as a source of information about the unseen world, it does include ritual practices that would seem "religious" to an outside observer, including ritual ablutions before entering sacred space and bows and claps before an altar where various deities are enshrined. The monthly magazine for Ai 200 Tomo no Kai includes Kuroda's explanations of spiritual topics as well as excerpts from his *manga*.[33]

Kuroda says that around 500 people regularly attend the five or so major meetings of SKSS a year, and smaller numbers attend the bimonthly regional meetings. The group is currently building a large dome in the mountains of Yamanashi prefecture, slated for completion in the summer of 2008. The dome will serve as a channeling point for the three kinds of "light" that pervade the universe, namely fire, earth, and water (Kuroda's wife told me that the group's usage of the word *hikari* 光, or light, is actually closer to

"vibration"). The group practices what Kuroda calls *jôkô* 浄光, which is the transmission of light out of the hands in a state of concentration. This light is allegedly curative, and they say that practicing *jôkô* on food will alter its taste. Kuroda's editor, Watanabe Yoshitomo, told me that getting trained in *jôkô* practice requires a two-day training session with Kuroda. Watanabe, Kuroda's wife Minako, and Kuroda himself gave me several examples of the curative or salubrious power of *jôkô* during our third meeting.

Kuroda sees his inductive and largely intuitive research into the unseen world as part of a grand plan in the development of the cosmos. His cosmological thought is highly detailed and generally maintains a clear internal logic, borrowing from science as much as from mythology and cosmogony. Kuroda believes in an intelligent designer (whom the group calls Sushin 主神) who created the world and set the process in motion. Around the phenomenal world is the larger unseen world, and humans are constantly in contact with this unseen world.

Kuroda is highly suspicious of religion, but said that the group's practice of transmitting light through the hands to another person (for physical and spiritual healing) legally required incorporation as a religious body. I asked if one might say then that the incorporation as a religion was just a surface formality (*tatemae* 建前), but Kuroda suggested that this was not the case, although he seemed clearly unwilling to go so far as to explicitly call his group a "religion." He prefers to think of it as a forum for people to explore the "irrational" (my word, by which I mean non-scientific or otherwise empirically unverifiable in a non-pejorative sense) without the structure of a formal

religion and doctrine. Indeed, it is the concept of static doctrine in particular that Kuroda dislikes—he prefers to be able to modify his own teachings as his research dictates.

Although Kuroda's vision is impaired and he no longer writes much, his activities with the group seem to be vigorous. He sees the group as his response to many fans' requests for more information about the unseen world, and particularly about their uncertainties about their lives and their quests for meaning. The group's literature, while generally avoiding any explicit mention of religion, definitely emphasizes its ability to provide comfort, stability, and happiness through knowledge of the unseen world. Kuroda's writings weave fiction together with Kuroda's pronouncements on the nature of the unseen world, interspersed with illustrations drawn by Kuroda's staff. The language is matter-of-fact and accessible, although getting accustomed to Kuroda's characteristic (unorthodox) use of obscure characters for everyday words requires some adjustment. The website is updated regularly with monthly lessons and updates usually include a short excerpt from one of Kuroda's earlier *manga*. The website also sells various goods (towels, soap, organizers, and so forth) that have salubrious properties due to the fact that they have been treated with *jôkô*, accompanied by a number of attestations of their effectiveness by satisfied consumers.

Kuroda's home includes a worship space [*shinden* 神殿], where an altar holds a representation of the creator deity in the center, and to the right a representation of the deities of fire, water, and earth. During my visit, Watanabe took me upstairs to this room, and we both performed cursory ablutions before entering. Watanabe instructed me to sit still while he performed his *reihai* 礼拝, which consisted of a pattern of bows and

claps very similar to worship practices performed at Shinto shrines. He then explained the significance of some of the things in the room. The braided cords on each side of the altar represented the five main ethnic/ancestral groups of humanity (from the lost continent of Mu). The tatami floor itself was to represent a grass field, and the multilayered colors on the walls represented mountains, hills, and lakes. The door showed a smaller version of the same scene, but at sunset.

Overall, my impression of Kuroda was that he very much reflects the spirituality culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He retains suspicion regarding both science and religion while relying upon the successes of both in the creation of his worldview, and sees his intuitive explorations of the unseen world (*mienai sekai* 見えない世界, a term he claims to have coined) as crucial to the advancement of society as a whole. Kuroda repeatedly referred to the "principles" (*hôsoku* 法則) of the unseen world, and feels his main task is to disseminate information about these principles to whoever will listen. He seemed to be excited to talk with me largely because of the opportunity to elaborate upon these principles to a young person, an academic, and a foreigner. After each of our meetings he insisted that we meet again, but I had no impression that he was attempting to recruit.

Manga provided Kuroda with a forum to elaborate on the principles of the unseen world, and through his celebrity as a *manga* artist he received invitations to visit religious groups, allowing him to encounter religious teachings like those of Mahikari.[34] *Manga* also provided Kuroda with an audience; undoubtedly his ability to form SKSS derived from his status as a famous author. It was apparently initially a struggle to write the kind

of horror *manga* that Kuroda wanted to write, so Kuroda's celebrity and popularity in the late 1970s may have been associated with impressions of his work as pioneering or radical.

SKSS is not a large group, and even the numbers recorded in academic sources (between four and six thousand) are significantly larger than the one thousand or so adherents that Kuroda claimed to have during our initial interview. However, Kuroda is a particularly fascinating figure in light of his public status as both a *manga* artist and as a leader of a legally recognized religious group.

In the cases of the few *manga* artists who have started their own religions, certainly their notoriety as religious leaders relies to a great extent on their celebrity as *manga* artists, and most adherents presumably encounter the ideas of the group through the *manga* first and only secondarily through other literature. Groups like Kuroda's are successful because of the affective power of the narrative and the intellectual persuasiveness of the ideas found in the artist's works. The appeal of the ideas or content, augmented by the charisma of the author, combines to form an imagined community (the audience) that can function in a religious or a quasi-religious fashion with or without formal legal incorporation as a religion.

Conclusions

Religion as consumed through or created by media—mediated religion—takes place in the everyday, mundane lived experiences of people who nevertheless may take the messages therein or the ritual practice involved (e.g., watching film) as meaningful, significant, or even necessary for living fulfilled lives. Although audience approaches to religious content within media may be casual, media still serve as an important and

influential vector for the dissemination of religious information. Media also serve as sites for ritual practice, and media products sometimes become the objects of canonization by various interest groups. Looking carefully at how religious information is woven into the daily lives of ordinary people (that is, people who are not vocationally religious) through media like *manga* and *anime*, we can understand how religions or religious ideas and ideals are perceived, maintained, modified, and reinvented.[35]

As we have seen in this chapter, audiences may utilize reading or watching *manga* and *anime* as an opportunity for self-reflection, as an impetus for changes in lifestyle (including conversion), as a site or model for ritual action, or as a canonical text or liturgy. The example of Kuroda Minoru's group illustrates a situation in which the religious intentions of the author and the religious inclinations of part of his audience coincide, resulting in the birth of a new religious group based upon the canonization of the author's works and the author's dual status of spiritual guide and entertainer. In contrast, however, many times the intentions of authors and audiences are not so consonant. The following chapter examines one example, through a case study of the works of *anime* director and *manga* artist Miyazaki Hayao.

NOTES

[1] The professor in question did not mention any particular works that he found exceptionally egregious, and my impression is that many academics repeat these critiques of *manga* and *anime* without reading the products carefully to determine their actual accuracy. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that *manga* presentations of Shinto tend to romanticize ancient Shinto while also simplifying Shinto mythology. One example might be Hagazono Masaya's *Inugami* 『犬神』 [*Dog God*], which portrays Shinto priests as possessors of genetically inherited supernatural powers and downplays their roles as ritualists. See Hagazono Masaya 外薗昌也, *Inugami* 犬神 [*Dog God*] (Tokyo: Afternoon Comics, Kôdansha 1997—2000).

[2] For an equivalent look into young people's absorption of religious information in the United States, see Lynn Schofield Clark, "Religion, Twice Removed: Exploring the Role of Media in Religious Understandings among 'Secular' Young People," in Nancy Ammerman, ed. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69—82.

[3] This concept is based on Inoue Nobutaka's concept of "hyper-religion." See INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô: ushinawareta zahyôjiku* [*Young People and Contemporary Religion: The Lost Coordinate Axis*] (Chikuma Shinsho, 1999), 115—178.

[4] HIRAFUJI Kikuko 平藤喜久子, "Rôru pureingu geemu no naka no shinwagaku" ロールプレイングゲームの中の神話学 [Mythology in Role Playing Games], in Watanabe Naoki 渡邊直樹, ed. *Shûkyô to gendai ga wakaru hon 2007* 宗教と現代がわかる本2007 [*The 2007 Guide to Religion and the Present*] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2007), 168—171.

[5] Hirafuji Kikuko, "Rôru pureingu geemu," 168.

[6] Nancy Ammerman, "Introduction: Observing Religious Modern Lives," in Nancy Ammerman, ed. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6. Certainly religious specialists have never really had full control over their audiences' uses of religious information. Doctrinal purity is a myth that is predicated upon the assumption that religious teachings are static, an assumption that has not at all been borne out historically.

[7] YONEI Teruyoshi 米井輝義, "Ichirei shikon," in Inoue Nobutaka 井上順孝, ed. *Shintô jiten* [*The Encylopedia of Shinto*] (Tokyo: Kôbundô, 1999), 379.

[8] TAKAHASHI Rumiko 高橋留美子, *Inuyasha* 犬夜叉 [*Dog-spirit*], vols. 1—15 (Tokyo: Shôgakukan Shônen Sunday Comics, 1997).

[9] From an Inuyasha fan site, <http://www.freewebs.com/inuyasha6/> Initially accessed 25 January 2007.

[10] ANNO Hideaki 庵野秀明, dir. *Shinseiki ebuangerion* 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン [*Neon Genesis Evangelion*] (Gainax, 1995—1996).

[11] KOBAYASHI Yoshinori 小林よしのり, *Yasukuniron* 靖国論 [On Yasukuni] (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 2005).

[12] TAKEI Hiroyuki 武井宏之, *Shaman Kingu* シャーマン・キング [*Shaman King*], vol. 1 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1998).

[13] The students filled out the survey after I had finished a brief lecture on studying as a foreigner in Japan and had, as part of that, introduced the topic and some of the content of my research on religious *manga* culture. Students' reports of the effects of *manga* and *anime* on their worldviews can only be taken at face value given this context, and obviously I have focused on externally verifiable data such as ritual practice and conversion in this and other chapters because they are more reliable (or at least suggestive) indicators of the effectiveness of *manga* and *anime* in educing or inculcating religious attitudes.

[14] INOUE Takehiko 井上雄彦 [art] and YOSHIKAWA Eiji 吉川英治 [draft], *Bagabondo* バガボンド [*Vagabond*], vols. 1—25 (Tokyo: Kôdansha Comics Morning, 1998—2007).

[15] Personal interview, 24 April 2007.

[16] Only 21.8 percent of respondents said that they had not had such feelings or experiences, meaning that around 20 percent of respondents chose not to answer the question.

[17] OGINO Makoto 荻野真, *Kujakuô* 孔雀王 [*Peacock King*], vols. 1—11 (Tokyo: Shûeisha Bunko, 1997).

[18] YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, et. al. Roundtable Discussion, "Anime ni miru shûkyôsei: osusume anime 'gekiron' zadankai" アニメに見る宗教性—おすすめアニメ "激論" 座談会 [Religiosity Seen in Anime: The 'Vehement' Roundtable Discussion on Recommended *Anime*], in *Pippara* vol. 472, 1 September 2003, 16.

[19] Personal communication, 5 April 2007.

[20] For an introduction to the realm of *cosplay*, see Theresa Winge, "Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay," in Frenchy Lunning, ed. *Mechademia*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 65—76. Parallels exist between costume play here and in other emergent religions such as UFO groups.

[21] See Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual and the Media," in *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 219—234.

[22] Thanks to Jesse LeFebvre for the photo.

[23] ISHII Kenji, "Jôhôka to shûkyô" [*The Information Age and Religion*]," in SHIMAZONO Susumu and ISHII Kenji, eds. *Shôhi sareru <shûkyô>* [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 205.

[24] Personal interview with Satô Kenji (a pseudonym), 24 April 2007.

[25] UCHIYAMA Hiroki and FUKUI Yôhei, "20 dai no 'gachi' nashonarizumu" 20代の『ガチ』ナショナリズム [*The Twenty-something Nationalistic 'Tendency'*], in AERA (Asahi Shinbun Extra Report and Analysis), 30 August 2004, 12—13.

[26] Japanese Kabuki drama, for example, was a plebian form of entertainment through the Edo period (1600—1868), but now is viewed as high culture.

[27] For a more in-depth overview of the group and Kuroda's teachings than I provide here, see YONEYAMA Yoshio 米山義男, "Subikari kôha sekai shindan: su no hikari to gekiga media" ス光光波世界神団—スの光と劇画メディア [Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan: The Light of Su and the Media of Graphic Novels], in SHIMIZU Masato 清水雅人, ed. *Shinshûkyô jidai 3* 新宗教時代３ [*The Age of New Religions 3*] (Tokyo: Daizô Shuppan, 1995), 53—95.

[28] Tsushima Hirofumi, "Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan," entry in the online *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, <http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=662>. Initially accessed 20 September 2006.

[29] Kuroda Minoru, *Reibusshitsu jinrui ki jô/ge kan* 霊物質人類期上・下巻 [*Record of the Human Spirit Matter*, vols. 1 and 2] (Tokyo: Kokonoe Shuppan, 1990—1991); *Yûtai no fune* 幽体の舟 [*Boat of the Spirit-Body*] (Tokyo: Kokonoe Shuppan, 1987); *Sanshoku no kotonoha* 三色の言葉 [*Words of the Three Colors*], vols. 1—4 (Tokyo: Kokonoe Shuppan, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004).

[30] See Helen Hardacre, "Asano Wasaburô and Japanese Spiritualism in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," in *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy 1900-1930*, Sharon A. Minichiello, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 133—153. Incidentally, Asano had been friends with Deguchi Onisaburô 出口王仁三郎, the charismatic second-generation leader of Ômotokyô 大本教, and Onisaburô had initiated Asano into the shamanistic practice of *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神.

[31] See Yoneyama, "Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan," 68—74.

[32] Yoneyama, "Subikari Kôha Sekai Shindan," 73—74.

[33] The magazine can be found at the following website: <http://www.ai200.com/>. Initially accessed 8 January 2007.

[34] Kuroda was influenced by Asano Wasaburô, who in turn was influenced by Deguchi Onisaburô, who in turn influenced Okada Kôtama, who invited Kuroda to join Mahikari; Okada's death prompted Kuroda's founding of SKSS.

[35] See Nancy Ammerman, "Introduction: Observing Religious Modern Lives," 5.

CHAPTER 4. *SHÛKYÔ ASOBI* AND MIYAZAKI HAYAO'S *ANIME*

THE PLAYFUL USAGE OF "RELIGIOUS" INFORMATION IN POPULAR FICTION

The preceding chapters (as well as the title of this work) have generally focused on *manga*, primarily because it seems that although *anime* forms a significant part of religious *manga* culture, it usually forms a secondary or even tertiary means of disseminating a particular story and its characters to a wider audience. With the exception of works that are made specifically for television or the theater, Japanese audiences generally approach *anime* with background knowledge that comes from the *manga* (or sometimes the novel) upon which the film is based, and thus it makes sense to focus first upon *manga* storylines, especially since they are generally more detailed than the *anime* that they inspire. However, as mentioned in the first chapter, *anime* may contribute to consumers' sense of belonging to a community with shared experiences and corresponding ideals, and thus this work would be incomplete without a case study of influential *anime* related to or representative of contemporary Japanese religion, religiosity, or attitudes towards or characteristic of both. Accordingly, I have chosen to focus this chapter on acclaimed (and award-winning) director Miyazaki Hayao 宮崎駿 and his oeuvre, both because his work (like Tezuka Osamu's 手塚治虫 in the case of *manga*) can be seen as seminal and definitive, and because his *anime* are generally produced for theater screenings, thus bypassing the process of initial publication in print.[1]

The limited amount of extant writing on the general topic of religion and *anime* in Japan deals largely with tracing themes from these popular films back to traditional religions like Shinto,[2] an exercise that largely overlooks audience members'

interpretations of those themes. These arguments are complicated by theoretical approaches to religion and film that suggest that the act of viewing film might fulfill a religious or ritual function.[3] While the latter type of analysis is more compelling than the former, both largely suggest surprise or satisfaction that religion persists or exists in a seemingly secular environment (animated film). This surprise or satisfaction overlooks the more subtle aspects of the forms that religion is taking and the effects that the conflation of religion and entertainment are having on generations of people in a society where religion has not been secularized so much as diversified and outsourced.[4] This chapter takes a different approach by making a case study of director Miyazaki Hayao's films, exploring the attitudes towards religion, entertainment, and spirituality that underlie their production and consumption.

Definitions

Shûkyô Asobi

The artificial distinction between religion and entertainment[5] upon which the aforementioned analyses are based neglects the historical tendency within Japan for the conflation of, or oscillations between, the two (e.g., *emaki* 絵巻, *sekkyôbushi* 説教節). This combined religion-entertainment has been a prevalent part of Japanese culture, and can be seen in a number of products and activities, some of which include *manga* and *anime* and their production.[6]

Here, using the words *shûkyô* 宗教 (religion) and *asobi* 遊び (play, or entertainment), I propose the term *shûkyô asobi* 宗教遊び[7] to describe this area of Japanese religious culture. *Shûkyô asobi* is a conflation of religion and entertainment

which: 1) can be viewed as religious in its production or consumption; 2) can also be said to be one of the many alternative strategies for negotiating spiritual needs in post-war and postmodern social circumstances;[8] 3) draws upon, but also modifies, existing religious themes;[9] 4) can have a moral or spiritual effect on the audience, including an effect on how people view or practice religion, not necessarily limited to sect or a specific doctrine; [10] 5) allows for oscillations between religion and entertainment while nevertheless referring to the space where the two overlap; and 6) therefore isolates those moments where entertainment experiences provide the impetus or environment for religious learning or behavior, or where religious doctrine, ritual and pedagogy act as modes of entertainment.

Shûkyô *(Religion) and* Shûkyôshin *(Spirituality)*

There is extensive documentation of the definitional pitfalls inherent in the word "religion." The word *shûkyô* 宗教, the closest Japanese equivalent, is problematic because, like popular definitions of religion, it points to a limited field that highlights allegiance, sect, and doctrine.[11] Accordingly, scholars have come to recognize that Japanese claims to belief and actual religious practice often differ remarkably.[12] As University of Tokyo scholar of religion Shimazono Susumu 島薗進 has suggested, contemporary Japanese religiosity is diversifying and people are outsourcing religion to other areas.[13]

This outsourcing suggests a movement away from traditional structures, where religious affiliation and practice were determined by family and community, and towards what a number of scholars have identified as individualized religion[14] or spirituality.[15]

Many Japanese have maintained religiosity while jettisoning religion, which is perceived as relatively restrictive.[16] There is a general trend to replace the noun "religion" with the adjective "religious," removing the emphasis from possessive allegiance and refocusing it upon individual perception and practice, dismissing strict piety in favor of a personalized and often informal belief.[17]

While only around thirty percent of Japanese people claim to have religious belief (and the percentage is significantly lower among young people), roughly seventy percent claim that spirituality (*shûkyôshin* 宗教心, literally, a religious mind/heart) is important.[18] This spirituality manifests itself in practices centered primarily on the acquisition of worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益), in fascination with the occult and the supernatural, and in various divination practices.[19] While practitioners use all of these things precisely because they do not require allegiance or even clearly articulated faith,[20] scholars of religion recognize that they comprise an important part of contemporary Japanese religious practice.[21]

However, the fact that people involved in "new spirituality movements and culture" (*shinreisei undo/bunka* 新霊性運動・文化)[22] resist connections to formal religion cannot be overlooked. Shimazono Susumu writes:

> The word "spirituality" is used because many people in these movements consider that they belong to a new age of "spirituality" that is to follow the age of "religion" as it comes to an end. "Spirituality" in a broad sense implies religiousness, but it does not mean organized religion or doctrine. Rather, it is used to mean the religious nature expressed by an individual's thoughts and actions. Another common element for many of these movements is a sense of a revival of something religious in a broad sense for the individual in the present times.[23]

These movements allow individuals to be both religious and nonreligious simultaneously, and scholars of religion thus have a responsibility to treat spirituality as a worthy subject of study within their field while also respecting the resistance to formal religion that spirituality movements tend to display.[24] Both formal religions and spirituality help people to determine how to live a good and moral life in the face of the inevitability of death and the difficulties presented by human relationships. Both offer narratives that can refer to transcendence or to immanence, and sometimes affirm or re-enact these narratives through ritualized behavior including (but not limited to) the acquisition of worldly benefits, healing practices, pilgrimages, divination, and entertainment activities. While spirituality movements often use modes of transmission and social organization other than those used by formal religions, this can be seen largely as reflecting the relatively recent changes brought about by decentralization, rapid communication through diverse media, and internationalization.[25] New spirituality movements can thus be perceived as some of the most recent developments in world religion, just as some formal religions can be seen as having arisen from the equivalent of spirituality movements.[26]

In a way, because they present religious material in an environment where participants see themselves as audience members and consumers more than as believers or adherents,[27] spirituality movements themselves can be seen as playing with the stuff of religion. My usage of *shûkyô* in *shûkyô asobi* views contemporary Japanese religion as inclusive of spirituality movements and culture while acknowledging that the resistance to formal religion sometimes found within these movements is often an integral part of their composition. This resistance to formal religion is leveled particularly at religions in

their current forms. Spirituality movements frequently point to an "original" or idealized future state of religion that they try to recover or create, respectively. They often create a network of like-minded individuals through the use of various media,[28] just as media frequently become the sites where the conflation of entertainment and religion occurs.

Playfulness:* Asobu *(To Play) and* Asobi *(Play)

The verb *asobu* 遊ぶ in Japanese carries connotations of play, diversion, pleasure, and enjoyment, but is perhaps most succinctly described by the English word "entertainment."[29] While frequently translated into English as "to play," and accordingly associated with the activities of children or with games, the word *asobu* is more diverse in usage, covering a wider variety of activities associated with entertainment and leisure. Some examples include playing music and dancing (including *kagura* 神楽 sacred dance), diversion, entertainment, outdoor activities, hunting, strolling, gamboling (as in that of children or animals), travel, loitering, being let loose or set free (as in land lying fallow, money accumulating interest, or a tool left unused or free to move), gambling, teasing, or being teased.[30] *Asobu* is also commonly used euphemistically to refer to sex (especially of the casual variety) or related activities such as prostitution. Etymologically, however, *asobu* refers to "the will to be liberated in mind and body from daily life, and to entrust one's self to another reality [utopia] (*nichijô seikatsu kara shinshin wo kaihô shi, bettenchi ni mi wo yudaneru i* 日常生活から心身を解放し、別天地に身を委ねる意)."[31]

In other words, *asobi* 遊び (play) changes the form or shape of something commonplace in order to amuse and to delight us. While at times educational or

edifying, the activity of play suggests a relaxing or escapist flight from mundane concerns. Yet the experience of play often reflects those concerns by challenging and critiquing them through the artifices of pretense, humor, transformation, and manipulation. This mercurial activity therefore offers both respite from and reconciliation with the serious elements of daily life. Within this broad scope of playful liberation and critique, I highlight especially the elements of entertainment and diversion, transformation and manipulation (e.g., word play [*kotoba asobi* 言葉遊び], to play with, to play upon).[32]

With the caveat that "experience" is a term that strongly reflects linguistic and cultural backgrounds and is not always the best descriptor of religious activity,[33] I suggest that a certain segment of Japanese religious experience can be characterized by the verb *asobu*, in that it is related directly to the things people do nominally or superficially for entertainment, not necessarily for religious purposes, but which nevertheless have a clearly discernible religious element or nature. The phrase *shûkyô asobi* can be used to describe the aforementioned conflation, referring to the particular concept of "religious entertainment," and "playful religion," pointing to the important area where modifications of religious behavior, outlook, and/or knowledge occur within spaces equally devoted to entertainment or, alternatively, where religious practice and pedagogy simultaneously behave as entertainment experiences.

Playful Religious Expressions in Popular Culture

The relationship between contemporary popular fictional media and understandings of religion in Japan has been documented to a certain degree. Inoue

Nobutaka 井上順孝 suggests that *manga* are already affecting children's notions of traditional religious taboos,[34] and Mark Wheeler MacWilliams describes the effects of Tezuka Osamu's 手塚治虫 modification of the Buddha's story on his young readership in his *manga* hagiography.[35] In a 1996 article, Yamanaka Hiroshi 山中弘 attempts to categorize relationships between religion and *manga* culture by dividing what he calls "religious *manga*" (*shûkyô manga* 宗教マンガ) into the categories "religious community *manga*," "psychic and occult *manga*," "religious vocabulary *manga*" and "*manga* that acts as religious text,"[36] describing the content of the genre and the potential effects it has on its audience, the successes and failures of each subgenre, and the liberties producers take in utilizing religious themes.

There is also precedent abroad for popular culture profoundly affecting doctrine and belief. Meir Shahar suggests that the Chinese vernacular *xiaoshuo* 小說 (plays enacted by peripatetic performers) were intended primarily as entertainment, but they nevertheless came to influence formal religion, changing popular conceptions of deities, and at times even creating deities. Shahar succinctly states: "[E]ntertainment and religious education are not incompatible, profit and merit not mutually exclusive."[37] The same trend exists in the *anime* of filmmaker Miyazaki Hayao, which I examine as a case study below.

Movie Watching as Religious Behavior

Although these connections between popular culture and religion have been traced to a certain degree, I would argue that the connections between movie watching and religious behavior deserve closer analysis. As a point of departure, John C. Lyden's

book, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*, argues that many activities not apparently religious can fulfill a religious function.[38] Lyden states:

> Films offer a vision of the way the world should be (in the view of the film) as well as statements about the way it really is; the ritual of filmgoing unites the two when we become a part of the world projected on screen... Films offer an entry into an ideally constructed world.[39]

Although I hesitate to say that all movie watching is religious, the concept that movie watching can assume a religious function in a society is compelling. Lyden suggests that religion is a cultural construct, the definition of which often obscures the function of other cultural activities that are equally religious.[40] He takes issue with analyses that solely focus on theological or ideological views on religion and film,[41] which have dominated the writing on Miyazaki Hayao and religion thus far. Lyden emphasizes the action of viewing film religiously, as both a ritual practice and as a conveyor of moral and mythic scriptural content. His work helps us to find religious *practice* in film, not merely imagery or doctrine.

However, limiting the analysis to social or ritual function alone overlooks the influence that the incorporation of conventional or traditional religious themes has on movie watching itself; it also avoids the more difficult subject of the effect entertainment has upon people's religious knowledge and practice. The very inclusion of traditional religious imagery will no doubt affect to what extent people watch films religiously—that is, in a religious frame of mind—and people's religious practice (including and beyond that of watching film) may be altered by film, not simply supplanted or supplemented by it. S. Brent Plate writes: "Films do not merely appear on a screen; rather, they only exist in any real sense as far as they are watched, becoming part of the fabric of our lives.

Film viewing is thus a social activity that alters our interactions in the world."[42] Films convey messages and serve as sites for ritualized action, and the dynamics between producers and consumers of films reflect these functions. Who participates in the ritual of viewing film (or in rituals based upon film content) and how, who makes the film and why, is fundamental to apprehending the conflation of film and religion.

Ronald L. Grimes helps to put these issues in context by classifying the connections between ritual and media and presenting eleven modes of intersection between the two. Of these, five categories particularly apply to ritual and film in light of Lyden's claims about watching film as a religious practice: 1) subjunctive (or ludic) ritualizing (as in rituals performed in online games); 2) magical rites with a media device as fetish or icon (healing power from an evangelist through the television); 3) ritual use of a media device (worship services built around CD-ROMs); 4) mediated ritual fantasy (vicarious ritual); and 5) media as a model for ritual activity (Hollywood gestures imitated in liturgical space).[43] Keeping these categories in mind, and recognizing that ritual and narrative are often interlinked, we can determine more precisely how the ritual of film watching and the rituals that arise from the content of film work.

Films can teach religious content, reflecting the ideology of the filmmaker in the process. They can also provide sites and models for ritual activity, reflecting both preexisting ritual traditions and modifications and innovations of ritual based upon film. As Plate writes: "[R]eligions and cultures do not merely *use* media, but instead are *used by* media, and created by them."[44]

Anthropologist Philip Lutgendorf's analysis of the movie *Jai Santoshi Maa* explores these connections, examining the religiosity of the movie content as well as the

influence on its audience in light of mythological and ritual elements that inform Hindu devotional worship. The movie both draws upon and modifies existing mythology and ritual: "The [movie] incorporated both a modified enactment of the *vrat katha* [simply, a ritual story] narrative and a paradigmatic performance of the ritual."[45] In the process of watching the film, the audience is invited vicariously into a ritual *darshan* (visual communion) with the featured goddess.[46] As a whole, "the film presents a well-crafted narrative abounding in references to folklore and mythology and offering a trenchant commentary on social convention; it also develops a 'visual theology' that is particularly relevant to female viewers."[47]

Aside from the vicarious or mediated ritual within the film, cinemas and other sites of viewing film can become ritual space; film can also create new followings for particular religious traditions or spirituality movements. Summarizing Lutgendorf's essay on *Jai Santoshi Maa*, Plate states: "[D]evout viewers entered cinemas barefoot and performed *puja* [rituals] in front of the goddess Santoshi Maa [sic]....As a result of the film, a massive following of this previously obscure goddess erupted across northern India."[48] Anita Guha, the actress who played the goddess Santoshi Ma in the film, said: "Audiences were showering coins, flower petals and rice at the screen in appreciation of the film. They entered the cinema barefoot and set up a small temple outside. ... It was a miracle."[49] The act of watching the film came to serve a ritual function, and the explosion in Santoshi Ma worship shows that the film became a catalyst for religious behavior.

Lutgendorf's explanation of the multiple connections between film, ritual, and mythology refuses to simplify them by making film merely a conveyor of religious

doctrine or a ritual substitute for traditional religion. His analysis shows the reciprocal and recursive process between existing doctrine and mediated ritual, between new ritual and renewed doctrine. Viewers can become adherents to an existing religious tradition even as the tradition itself changes in response to the film. Films can thus serve both as gateways to and creators of religious cultures. In those situations where preexisting religions are viewed with doubt or suspicion, or where spirituality is highly valued, films can provide alternative narrative, mythological and ritual spaces that draw viewers into spirituality movements.[50] As a descriptive term of these processes and relationships, *shûkyô asobi* combines narrative and ritual elements in an amalgamation of play, entertainment, and religion.

CASE STUDY: MIYAZAKI HAYAO'S *ANIME*

We can see a clear example of *shûkyô asobi* by examining the work of *anime* director Miyazaki Hayao in more detail. In what follows, I take up four of Miyazaki's *anime* in light of what the director himself says about their production, and also in light of audience responses to them. These responses show that ritual reactions to, and interactions with, Miyazaki's films show a sincere conception of the existence and/or efficacy of the gods, saviors and spirits therein as instructive and inspiring. The ritual of watching film, the rituals enacted vicariously through the film, and the rituals performed in reality but created through the influence of the film all resonate with elements of Grimes' taxonomy of ritual and media. Miyazaki's films serve as religious texts that inspire and exhort people to alterations in behavior; they are sometimes used ritually (repetitively, as liturgical texts, as scripture) for edification as well as entertainment. Furthermore, the cosmology and mythology of the films comes to be interpreted and

applied to reality after the films end. At times this results in audience members recreating rituals in reality that they learned through the film narrative; audience members may also identify certain physical places as sacred because they were the alleged inspiration for sacred places found within the narrative realms of the films themselves. In light of these factors, those of Miyazaki's films that are raised here can all be placed into the "emotive" category raised in Chapter Two.

In general, *anime* and *manga* often incorporate religious themes ranging from hagiography to criticism of the role of religion in society.[51] Just as *anime* deploys religious motifs, religious institutions and individuals deploy *anime* as a method of affecting audience outlook and behavior. Although the intent of the producers of *anime* and *manga* ranges from proselytization to profit, their products frequently conflate religion and entertainment in ways that have the potential to affect their audience religiously,[52] inviting and promoting faith, ritual action and moral edification.

Because of its blockbuster success (outclassing many Hollywood productions at the box office),[53] its critical acclaim (*Spirited Away* won an Oscar in 2003),[54] and technical wizardry (inviting academic and journalistic effusion),[55] Miyazaki's work in many ways epitomizes the forefront of Japanese popular *anime* production. The 1984 film *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* 『風の谷のナウシカ』 [*Naushika of the Valley of the Wind*],[56] based on a *manga* also written by Miyazaki, is the story of a young princess whose character includes elements of psychic, scientist and messiah. These elements help Naushika to reconcile humans and nature in a post-apocalyptic and polluted world. In the 1988 film *Tonari no Totoro* 『隣のトトロ』 [*My Neighbor Totoro*],[57] the

protagonists Mei and Satsuki befriend a benign forest spirit who helps them through a difficult period of transition. The 1997 film *Mononoke hime* 『もののけ姫』[*Princess Mononoke*][58] revolves around the intertwined relationships of gods and humans and humans and nature, emphasizing the necessity of strengthening humanity's connections with both. The 2001 film *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* 『千と千尋の神隠し』[*Spirited Away*] [59] shares this pedagogical approach, and takes place in a world populated with a diverse array of gods and spirits.

These films illustrate the fact that: 1) contemporary Japanese are making and watching films that draw upon and modify previously existing religious themes; 2) that moviemakers are creating movies with the intention of inculcating certain values that are at times religious; 3) that the films themselves have the ability to affect future interpretations of religious literature and content; and 4) that audiences can respond to the films in a spiritual fashion, if not a formally religious one. Looking at some of the previous treatments of Miyazaki and religion will help to put the case study into context.

Previous Examinations of Miyazaki and Religion

A number of authors have discussed the existence of Shinto and Buddhist elements in Miyazaki's work.[60] Writers such as James W. Boyd and Nishimura Tetsuya, Lucy Wright, and Lucy Wright and Jerry Clode[61] have focused on how the director has drawn upon and modified pre-existing religious themes, particularly those of Shinto.[62] Similarly, Japanese scholar of religion Masaki Akira 正木晃 has written at least two introductory texts to the discipline of religious studies that are based upon Miyazaki's works,[63] and Inoue Sizuka devotes an entire chapter to a convoluted and ultimately

unconvincing discussion of Miyazaki's films and their connection to religion.[64] These books and articles take the framework of Japanese religion as a backdrop against which to place Miyazaki's films, showing how they resonate with traditional religious culture despite what the analysts seem to perceive as the progressive secularization of the country.

Secularization theory as it applies to Japan is problematic,[65] and yet it seems that the authors premise their assessments of Miyazaki's work on the fact that it provides traditional religion with a requisite recovery, revival, or transformation. Wright, for example, writes: "Miyazaki is cinematically practicing the ancient form of Shinto, which emphasized an intuitive continuity with the *natural* world," continuing: "[his] work transforms and reinvigorates the tenets of Shinto."[66] Similarly, Boyd and Nishimura state: "It is our interpretation that Miyazaki is reaffirming aspects of the Japanese tradition preserved in Shinto thought and practice that can serve as transformative sources of confidence and renewal for both the young and old."[67] Yamanaka Hiroshi repeats this tendency in a very recent article, saying that *Spirited Away* "offers a secularized vision of traditional Japanese folk Shinto," but that it "carries... a deeply spiritual message of self-renewal."[68]

While tracing religious themes in popular film back to their traditional sources is helpful for determining the background from which religious symbols and content arise, limiting analysis of the films in question to that process neglects the function of religious entertainment as an alternative spiritual practice that may at times disdain connections with traditional religious forms. Audiences may choose to watch the films precisely because the films are not directly connected with traditional religious institutions.

Tracing themes back to formal religious doctrines or to idealized versions of premodern religion (including so-called "folk culture") is also problematic because it neglects specifically how religious entertainment might affect the audience's religious understanding or interpretation. The authors refer to the transformative power of the films, but the form that transformation takes is left as a vague notion lacking a theoretical framework, and is not an indication of concrete changes in practice, action, or belief. As Plate writes: "Films are not religious simply because of their *content* but become religious due to their *form* and *reception.*"[69]

Therefore it is imperative to analyze not only the religious doctrine that forms part of the cultural background of a film but also the motivation and intended message of the filmmaker; it is crucial to examine not only the ritual of watching film but also how film can give rise to changes in ritual behavior. Analyses that focus solely on older religious forms prevent us from seeing how the conflation of entertainment and religion might result in new religious thought or practice. The lack of audience voices gives no indication of *how* religion is being revitalized or, possibly, created.

Shûkyô Asobi in Miyazaki's Thought

While Miyazaki says that "all he wants to do is to entertain,"[70] elsewhere the director's statements suggest that he is at least partially motivated by a type of spirituality largely infused with an environmentalist ethic that seems to be predicated upon: 1) the existence of an immanent life-force that binds organisms together; and 2) the loss in present times of an idealized past where connections between organisms were both stronger and more respectful.[71] He seems to promote this ethic through film. He states:

> In my grandparents' time...it was believed that spirits [*kami*] existed everywhere—in trees, rivers, insects, wells, anything. My generation does not believe this, but I like the idea that we should all treasure everything because spirits might exist there, and we should treasure everything because there is a kind of life to everything.[72]

Yet despite this spiritual nostalgia, Miyazaki wants to distance himself from formal religion. Wright states: "Essentially, his films attempt to re-enchant his audiences with a sense of spirituality that eschews the dogmas and orthodoxies of organised religions and politics, instead reaching for the original, primal state of spiritualism [sic] in human history and how it can be lived today."[73] In an interview for *The Village Voice*, Miyazaki says:

> Dogma inevitably will find corruption, and I've certainly never made religion a basis for my films. My own religion, if you can call it that, has no practice, no Bible, no saints, only a desire to keep certain places and my own self as pure and holy as possible. That kind of spirituality is very important to me. Obviously it's an essential value that cannot help but manifest itself in my films.[74]

This manifestation, combined with the aforementioned underlying intent to entertain his audience, places Miyazaki squarely in the realm of *shûkyô asobi*. The act of moviemaking begins as an act of entertainment, but along the way it shades into an expression of spirituality, not only reflecting the director's views, but also attempting to inculcate certain values in his intended audience. Considering that audience in light of this, it should also not go unnoticed that Miyazaki has publicly recognized the consumer demand for spiritual content in Japan, and continues to make movies with this in mind.[75] Miyazaki's moviemaking, therefore, not only reflects his personal spirituality but also the audience's desire for spiritual themes; simultaneously, it reflects his basic desire to entertain and the audience's desire to be entertained. These overlapping desires result in

new modes of religious entertainment, or playful religion, shown in the following examples.

Shûkyô Asobi in Audience Reactions to Miyazaki's Works

My Neighbor Totoro

Miyazaki clearly draws upon but also modifies preexisting religious themes in his films. The nature spirits in *My Neighbor Totoro*,[76] for example, seem to be based upon traditional Japanese conceptions of kami 神. Yet Helen McCarthy reports that although Miyazaki referred to the *totoro* as "'nature spirits' of the same kind as those familiar in Japanese religion," the movie has, according to Miyazaki, "nothing to do with that or any other religion."[77] As McCarthy notices, the film makes an active contrast between Miyazaki's fantastic spirits and the cold, inert symbols of traditional religion.[78] The *totoro* represent a simultaneously new-old type of nature spirit strategically set in contrast to the preexisting (institutional) notions of kami. Whether or not Miyazaki's audiences believe in the existence of the *totoro* themselves, McCarthy argues that the film promotes an alternative perception of kami, tactically deploying traditional religious motifs as a foil for the magical, cuddly, and spiritually fecund *totoro*. In her analysis, the movie's pastoral narrative, combined with this refashioned kami,[79] simultaneously offers a critique of traditional religious institutions and contemporary urban living.[80]

This content alone suggests the power to affect at least a portion of Miyazaki's audience profoundly, and significantly many people who have grown up with Miyazaki's films have referred to *My Neighbor Totoro* as a favorite or as an influential film in their lives. Casual conversations with many Japanese acquaintances have prompted more than one person to comment on the ability of this film to "soothe" or calm one spiritually

(*seishintekini* 精神的に). One survey respondent also suggested that watching *Totoro* made her more interested in religion in general.

Additionally, audience reactions to the film on a Miyazaki-themed fan message board on the Japanese blog site, MIXI, include reactions that seem to shade towards the religious. One person, writing on the influence of Miyazaki's films, and about *Totoro* in particular, states: "Often, with my older sister we would...hold an umbrella and try to pray for the sprouts to grow,"[81] mimicking a scene in the movie in which the *totoro* lead Mei and Satsuki in a prayer-dance to grow sprouts into a giant tree. The children's imitation of the scene suggests the power of film to create ritual outside of movie watching itself.

Naushika of the Valley of the Wind

Scholars and critics have identified the *manga* that is the basis for Miyazaki's 1984 production *Naushika* as religious. Yamanaka Hiroshi places *Naushika* in the category of "*manga* that acts as a religious text" in his description of "religious *manga*."[82] He writes: "As a whole this *manga* [and I would add the *anime* based upon the *manga*] provides the same structure as a religious text like the Bible." *Naushika* is a drama about the salvation of the world and humanity; approaching social and environmental catastrophes become the stage for the actions of Naushika the savior.[83] Yamanaka concludes his section on Naushika thus: "In the midst of this drama of death and rebirth, Naushika the protector of the Valley of the Wind is reborn as Naushika the guardian angel [divine protector] of humanity."[84] Similarly, Shimizu Masashi 清水正 indicates Naushika's messianic status and supernatural abilities.[85] To Shimizu, not only is

Naushika immortal and possessor of supernatural powers (*chônôryokusha* 超能力者), she is also good, just, and the embodiment of love.[86]

Naushika, with its vivid apocalyptic vision, reflects Miyazaki's pedagogical impulse. He states:

> When I started Nausica [sic], my theory was one of extinction; when it ended, my theory was one of coexistence....There is no mighty intelligence that guides the world. We just keep repeating our mistakes....If we want mankind [sic] to live for another thousand years, we have to create the environment for it now. That's what we're trying to do.[87]

While denying the existence of a "mighty intelligence," Miyazaki uses preexisting religious motifs such as clairvoyance, apocalypse, and redemption to influence future outlook and behavior. Significantly, Miyazaki also admits—with some chagrin—that the closing scene of the *anime* version of *Naushika* made the work more apparently religious than he intended. He states:

> Even though it wasn't my intention to create a miraculous movie, it turns into a fine old religious scene. Even in the scene where Naushika comes back to life, I didn't intend any religious desires or miracles. Rather, when I realized that whatever I had been thinking had suddenly entered into the realm of religion I was really taken aback.[88]

The comments of *Naushika* fans on fan-based message boards suggest a long-lasting change in outlook based upon watching the film, and, at times, a ritualized way of watching the film, often referring to a sense of connection with other organisms that reflects belief in an immanent spiritual bond existing among all living things.[89] Here the audience affirms its connection with all of nature through repetitive viewings of the movie (ritual performed around a media device). The scene of Naushika's death and resurrection can be seen as a sort of mediated (vicarious) ritual as well. One person

draws a direct connection between *Naushika* and Christian ideas of death and resurrection, and suggests that the Ômu 王蟲 (giant insects that protect the fungal forest that has covered the earth) are actually divine.[90] Another person says, "Now Naushika seems far away from this reality in which we live, but really [she] is pointing to our current actions (like treating nature disrespectfully)."[91] The act of being entertained is simultaneously hermeneutic; audience members interpret the films and apply their lessons to reality.

Many fans evidently use *manga* as a source of inspiration for their actions in the world. This seemed particularly strong in interview respondent Morimoto Ari's* case. Not only did Ari want to become her fictional heroine Naushika, she has decided to pursue a career in environmental education that is a combination of her ethical, environmental, and political views—views that she says were solidified through her repetitive readings of the *Naushika manga.* Although Ari's idealism was tempered somewhat by several years of witnessing environmental and wilderness management firsthand in eastern Washington state as an exchange student, she has combined her *Naushika*-inspired and *Naushika*-influenced idealism with a pragmatic outlook on environmental management. After completing her graduate degree in environmental education abroad, Ari hopes to participate in grassroots environmental education programs in developing countries. She agreed when I asked if her career path had been shaped by her strong feelings towards *Naushika,* displaying a strong sense of affinity and connection with nature and her desire to work towards environmental and conservation causes.

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* A pseudonym

Naushika also profoundly affected Nozawa Keiko,* another respondent. Keiko was raised in a Christian household (incidentally, Christians form a very small minority in Japan), and her relatively strict upbringing meant that she was generally not allowed to read *manga* or to play video games. However, her parents recognized something in *Naushika* that was of educational value (Keiko agreed that Naushika's status as a messianic figure helps), and Keiko watched the *anime* repeatedly both as a child and as an adult. Upon a recent viewing shortly before our interview, Keiko found herself crying (*omowazu ni namida o poro poro nagashiteita* 思わずに涙をぽろぽろ流していた) at the final scene of the film, in which Naushika is resurrected after undergoing several severe injuries and what seems to have been a certain, if brief, death. Keiko also regularly used the word "mission" [*shimei* 使命] in our interview to describe how she views her job as a teacher—although she tries to keep her Christian faith private, she feels that, like Naushika, she has a strong mission to help people find their way in the world. Keiko also explicitly stated that she seeks to emulate Naushika's characteristics in her own life.[92]

Princess Mononoke

Miyazaki said of *Princess Mononoke*: "I've come to the point where I just can't make a movie without addressing the problem of humanity as part of an ecosystem,"[93] and his spiritual beliefs come to the fore when Susan J. Napier states:

> It is Miyazaki's notion that he and presumably other Japanese are the spiritual descendants of the "glossy leafed forests" that...once covered Japan...and that these vanished forests still exert a spiritual pull on the average urban dweller, and it was this that he attempted to dramatize in his

* A pseudonym

> creation of the forest of the *shishigami.* He explains "If you opened a map of Japan and asked where is the forest of the *shishigami* that Ashitaka went to, I couldn't tell you, but I do believe that somehow traces of that kind of place still exist inside one's soul."[94]

For part of the audience, the movie resonates with extant mythology or promotes ritual action, as the posts on a Miyazaki fan board attest. In response to a post entitled: "The Setting of Princess Mononoke" (*Mononoke hime no butaichi* もののけ姫の舞台地), one person wrote: "I really went to Yakushima 屋久島 [the alleged inspiration for the forest], and it seemed as if *Shishigamisama* [the main deity in the film] would really appear!" Another respondent wrote: "There [in Yakushima] people really believe in Mononoke Hime [Princess Mononoke]...[and the other animal gods] whereas [in Kumano 熊野, another potential setting] they believe in trees and waterfalls." A third person relates the story of how a friend traveled to Yakushima and had a *kodama* こだま (a kind of small tree spirit that features in the film) appear in a photograph.[95] The first person's comment suggests a kind of pilgrimage, a sort of ritual practice around a conception of sacred space created through the medium of film; the second person's comment shows connections (found or created) between existing mythology and the mythology of the film; the third person's story clearly crosses the (porous) boundary between the mythology of the film and reality—the *kodama* that appears in the photograph is an indication of its actual existence. Many of the commentators express a desire to visit Yakushima in the future, presumably to experience it as a place of mystery, inspiration, or the sacred.

Spirited Away

Responses to a leading post, "*Sen to Chihiro...ni kakusareta meseeji*" [Hidden messages in *Spirited Away*] on a Miyazaki fan site suggest that some members of the audience have had a spiritual response to that movie as well: from the aforementioned environmental commitment based upon the idea that all organisms are spiritually connected,[96] to a renewed respect for the distinction between divine and human (*kamisama no tabemono wo taberu* 神様の食べ物を食べる [eating the food of the gods/spirits]), to striving for a kind of spiritual love (*sûkô na ai* 崇高な愛).[97] Again, the message board posts are interpretive: fans use the films as a basis for determining moral action in their daily life. The other reality of film has come to profoundly affect the audience in this reality; the powerful images and the feelings that they promote persist. More than simply drawing on previous religious themes, Miyazaki has actively changed them by adding an environmental focus, and his fans have responded to the film in ways that can be interpreted as spiritual, if not formally religious.[98]

***The Production and Consumption of* Shûkyô Asobi**

These four examples portray *shûkyô asobi* in two important ways. On the one hand, they show how Miyazaki the director is playing with the stuff of religion; he utilizes religious motifs in a calculated fashion to encourage a particular audience response, and modifies traditional religious concepts for his particular pedagogical ends. On the other hand, Miyazaki's films—ostensibly created solely as a means of entertainment[99]—not only reflect Miyazaki's spiritual beliefs, but also seem to have the power to create responses such as ritualized behavior. In addition, the films appear to

generate hermeneutic thinking and exegesis, that is, interpreting films and applying those lessons to daily life. The director's spirituality seems to elicit similar spiritual responses in at least part of his audience, and therefore the movies have the power to create new forms of thought and practice that contribute to and are part of the wider field of contemporary Japanese religiosity.

STUDYING RELIGION THROUGH MIYAZAKI'S FILMS: MASAKI AKIRA

One additional important point regarding the consumption and interpretation of Miyazaki's works is the role of Masaki Akira's 正木晃 religious studies textbooks,[100] which attempt to teach young adults about religion—particularly Japanese religions—through the filter of Miyazaki's films. For example, in *Hajimete no shûkyôgaku: "Kaze no tani no Naushika" wo yomi toku* 『初めての宗教学—「風の谷のナウシカ」を読み解く』 [*Beginning Religious Studies: Reading "Naushika of the Valley of the Wind"*], Masaki writes: "This book is an introductory text [*nyûmon sho* 入門書] to religious studies that uses *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* as its instructional material."[101] As to why he chooses *Naushika* as his particular text, Masaki states that he: 1) "loves" [*daisuki* 大好き] the film; 2) that the film is "overwhelmingly superb" [*attô teki ni sugureteiru* 圧倒的にすぐれている]; 3) that an "enormous [amount] of information is enclosed within the film" [*bôdai na jôhô ga komerareteiru* 膨大な情報が込められている]; and 4) the film is "truly entertaining and has truly been seen by many people" [*jitsu ni omoshirokute, jitsu ni ooku no hitobito ga miteiru* 実に面白くて、実に多くの人々が見ている]. These unabashedly subjective statements lay the groundwork for Masaki's rather

confessional analysis of the film, which jumps from discussions of ancient Greek mythology (the alleged source of Naushika's name) to prophecy, monotheism, shamanism, wind/breath on macro- and microcosmic scales, and valleys as related to the feminine or to Daoism—all in the first chapter! The following chapters (and Masaki's other book on Miyazaki's film and religion) take a similar approach, resulting in a gallimaufry of information that almost certainly perplexes the audience as much or more than it instructs.

Masaki traces elements of traditional religion to the films in a rather haphazard or arbitrary fashion, as we saw earlier in the case of Lucy Wright. Yet Masaki's books differ from other scholarship on Miyazaki and religion because they explicitly claim to teach the discipline of religious studies (*shûkyôgaku* 宗教学) through Miyazaki's work. Rather than teaching the discipline of "religious studies," however, Masaki has utilized Miyazaki's films in the service of mystifying his intended audience (young adults) with a barrage of information about religious traditions that often has little to do with the film in question and even less to do with any discernible religious studies methodology. Masaki explicitly aims to blur distinctions, shooting for an expansive approach rather than a focused one[102]; the end result is impressionistic writing passing for scholarship that elides important cultural and historic distinctions in an eisegetic reading of the chosen subject (religion) into Miyazaki's films.

Masaki's predilection for environmental protection (evident in the closing chapters of both books cited above) is consonant with Miyazaki's professed love of nature. However, given his statements on organized religions, Miyazaki is doubtless less than pleased at such efforts to appropriate his work in the service of teaching about

religion. As introductory texts to the academic discipline of religious studies, Masaki's works contribute to arbitrary interpretations of popular texts and sources as "religious" while ignoring Miyazaki's subtle (in his films) and not-so-subtle (in personal interviews) critique of formal religions. However, unsuspecting Miyazaki fans who may be attracted to religious information because of the films might read Masaki's books uncritically, leading to yet another layer of interpretation of the films' religious content; Masaki thus effectively creates an orthodoxy in the interpretation of the works in question. This dynamic is difficult to gauge, but it deserves close attention.

In the public sphere, Miyazaki's works cease to be his alone, and are re-created by his fans and by scholars in multiple ways (and of course the present work is part of that process). *Shûkyô asobi* in this sense not only refers to those times where the search for entertainment leads to religion, it also refers to efforts like Masaki's where the search for religious information or religious material leads back to entertainment, Miyazaki's films in this case. Miyazaki's films certainly seem to be popular material for university courses on religion and film, as evidenced in my own conversations with a number of scholars at different universities who have used these films in their courses; I speculate that *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away* in particular regularly feature in course syllabi.

International Considerations

Furthermore, as in Japan, these media are also occasionally serving as something akin to scriptural or liturgical sources for North American audiences. As Susan Napier describes in her analysis of the Miyazaki Mailing List (a group that is associated with the website nausicaa.net), the mailing list serves as a sort of "sacred space" for the members,

where they can affirm and share their responses to Miyazaki's films.[103] Significantly, Napier uses the language of "pilgrimage" for fan visits to the website and to the mailing list or message boards. While Napier's analysis has little direct connection to a religious studies methodology or orientation, her insights regarding the ritualistic and quasi-religious elements of the group of Miyazaki fans is illustrative. The similarities between fan networks in Japan and elsewhere reflect the power of media to surpass boundaries in language and translation, creating broader networks of like-minded individuals who share the ideology, in this case, of Miyazaki Hayao's films and of Studio Ghibli works in general.[104] One of Napier's respondents described himself as an "atheist with some Ghiblist influences," and twenty-eight percent of respondents claimed to have religious feelings but no religious affiliation, often mentioning an interest in Buddhism or Shinto (presumably, or at least possibly, as a result of watching Miyazaki's works).[105] These responses suggest that Miyazaki's ideology may also be affecting international audiences in a moderately religious fashion.

Conclusions

I would like to conclude with a few final points on *shûkyô asobi*. First, Miyazaki's ambiguous statements make it difficult to associate him with any one particular religion, but they also indicate that the director seeks a simultaneously playful spirituality or a spiritual entertainment. Miyazaki's repeated choice to incorporate religious themes is likely just as much his recognition that "spiritual sells" as it is a reflection of the director's own spiritual views.[106] This pragmatic attitude, apparent I think in Miyazaki and part of his audience, reflects the fact that Japanese religion is based upon a strong sense of responding to mundane needs. This can manifest itself in both fervent religious

practice and in a seemingly more "irreverent" usage of religious stuff for mundane ends. *Shûkyô asobi*, broadly viewing religion as inclusive of spirituality, and resisting the artificial distinction between religion and entertainment, allows for and can describe Miyazaki's work.

Second, entries on fan message boards suggest that some audience members respond to Miyazaki's films in a spiritual fashion.[107] While Lyden has suggested that the ritual of film watching can be a religious experience, certainly only some of these fans would actively identify their response to Miyazaki's films as such. As members of the spirituality culture surrounding Miyazaki's films, they "consider themselves part of the audience, information consumers, and have no sense of belonging to a particular organization, sect or church."[108] Yet fans recognize something religious in Miyazaki's films even if they do not consider the films religion. *Shûkyô asobi* refers to that important element of Japanese religion where the mundane desire or need for the experience of entertainment shades into the mundane desire or need for the experience of religion.[109]

A third important element of *shûkyô asobi* in Miyazaki's films lies in the comparisons and contrasts that can be drawn regarding the *manga* and *anime* produced by formal religious institutions. Miyazaki's films subtly underscore his skepticism of formal religion, but formal religions have clearly recognized the proselytizing potential presented by *manga* and *anime*, sometimes producing large numbers of these products aimed at wide audiences.[110] Yet *manga* created by religious institutions are not necessarily always successful,[111] at times being treated with something close to derision.[112] In other words, when religious institutions attempt to package their religious

doctrines (*shûkyô*) in an ostensibly entertaining package (*manga* or *anime* in this case), the effectiveness of that product as entertainment media may be mitigated if the didactic orientations of the product are insufficiently masked. *Shûkyô* [religion] without *asobi* [play] that nevertheless masquerades as play is almost certainly less fun than unadulterated play itself. Audiences may indeed be open to learning moral or religious lessons through their entertainment media, but that is generally only if the media in question are emotive and persuasive rather than polemical or pedantic. Although the use of *anime* and *manga* as media for expressing and conveying religion is not going to disappear any time soon, it seems that films which serve as religious texts without specific institutional affiliations (like Miyazaki's) are more likely to reach and capture a wide audience than the products created by religious institutions. Obviously, this facet of the arguments in this chapter is related to the concept of "recreating religion" raised in the previous one.

Finally, the fact that scholars such as Masaki Akira are using Miyazaki's films as the subject matter for religious studies textbooks suggests that Miyazaki's works will continue to be connected to religion and spirituality by various interest groups in a variety of fashions, including being used as pedagogical sources for religious education or education about religion(s). Audiences will continue to enjoy the products in multiple ways, but those ways increasingly include using Miyazaki's films not only as entertainment, but also as inspirational texts, as liturgy, and as sources of religious information or even information about traditional Japanese religion (e.g., Shinto).

Ultimately, the artificial distinction between popular entertainment and religion needs to be replaced with an articulation of the utilization of the common space of

religious entertainment—or playful religion—by various interest groups. This is particularly important because established religions utilize popular media as a vehicle for religious instruction and proselytization; it is also important because pop culture producers draw upon spiritual/religious themes that obviously attract audiences. The result may be the creation of entirely new religious doctrines, interpretations, rituals, and beliefs.[113] *Shûkyô asobi*, fundamental to properly apprehending the seemingly discrete but conflated modes of religion and entertainment, can be found in other sectors of Japanese religion,[114] and outside of Japan as well.

This chapter has presented the neologism *shûkyô asobi* as one way of grasping the fundamentally interrelated elements of religion and entertainment found within religious *manga* culture. In general, the term points to ways in which religion, spirituality, and information about the two are created and re-created while people recreate: as producers "play" with the stuff of religion, audiences in turn consume the content in a simultaneously playful and spiritual fashion. In light of the diversification and proliferation of religion occurring at present, *shûkyô asobi* is an apt term for describing an element of religion that has been hitherto difficult to apprehend—the forms of religious thought and practice apparent and arising at the junction between entertainment and religion.

NOTES

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[1] Jaqueline Berndt's critique of the scholarly fascination with Miyazaki should not go unnoticed. See Jaqueline Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, Historicity," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 296—297. The overabundance of articles on Miyazaki and his oeuvre can be seen by purusing the database of academic articles on religion maintained by Mikhail Koulikov at <http://www.corneredangel.com/amwess/acad_1.html>. Initially accessed 23 March 2008. Of course, given Berndt's critique it is with some chagrin that I have contributed the present chapter to the academic discussion on Miyazaki, but the aim of the chapter is to provide a corrective for some of the essentialism that pervades much of that discussion.

[2] See, for example, Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki, Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999); Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); James W. Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki's Anime Film 'Spirited Away,'" *Journal of Religion and Film* 8, no. 2 (October 2004), online at <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol8No2/boydShinto.htm>; Lucy Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees: The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* X (Summer 2005), online at <http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art10-miyazaki-print.html>.

[3] For one example, see John C. Lyden, *Film As Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

[4] SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進, *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004), 2–3, 19–24, and 275–305; also quoted in HAMADA Nami 浜田奈美 "Kamisama wa imasu ka?" 神様はいますか？ [Do(es) God(s) Exist?], in *AERA* (Asahi Shinbun Extra Report and Analysis), vol. 18. No. 47. 5 September 2005, 45.

[5] See Stewart M. Hoover, "Introduction," in *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 4–5.

[6] On religion in *manga* culture, see YAMANAKA Hiroshi 山中弘, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô" マンガ文化の中の宗教 [Religion in *Manga* Culture], in SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 and ISHII Kenji 石井研士, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される＜宗教＞ [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 158–84.

[7] Thanks to Joel Cohn, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, University of Hawai'i at Manoa for helping to modify this term, and for suggesting that I reverse the word order (which I had originally proposed as *asobi shûkyô* 遊び宗教). *Shûkyô asobi*, as Dr. Cohn suggested, places more of an emphasis on the function of *asobi*, so that "play" modifies "religion." It also falls into a common pattern of phrasing in Japanese, such as *kotoba asobi* 言葉遊び (word play), that sounds more natural than the opposite, which is limited to a narrow set of noun compounds. Thanks go to Helen Baroni as well, who provided helpful comments on the earlier version of the term. Pennies also owed to my fellow graduate students at Hawai'i for their thoughts and suggestions.

[8] Shimazono, "Spirit Belief," in *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 164, 166–67. Shimazono describes the transition from pre- to postmodernity in Japanese religion, where the rise of a modernistic rationality produced both a dismissal of earlier religious institutions and practices and a corresponding rise in interest in new religious forms, particularly spirit belief. Elsewhere, Shimazono describes the diversification of spiritual strategies that have taken place since the latter 1970s, noting particularly that the older "new religions" ceased to be new, prompting a further wave of religious development characterized by the "new new religions" of Japan. SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 *Posutomodan shinshûkyô: gendai nihon no seishin*

jôkyô no teiryû ポストモダン新宗教–現代日本の精神状況の底流 [Postmodern New Religions: The Undercurrents of the Spiritual Situation of Contemporary Japan] (Tokyo: Tôkyôdô Shuppan, 2001), 1–86. Shimazono has also identified the boom in interest in the *seishin sekai* 精神世界 (spirit world), roughly equivalent to "New Age," as part of this overall trend. Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 293–305. On this point, see Jan Swyngedouw, "Religion in Contemporary Japanese Society," in *Religion and Society in Modern Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins, SHIMAZONO Susumu, and Paul L. Swanson (Fremont, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press [Jain Publishing Company], 1993), 67–70. Now, I do believe that the neologism can be applied to earlier historical periods, but for the purposes of this chapter have chosen to limit its use to late modernity.

[9] On the diversification and modification of existing religious themes, see Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 293–305.

[10] For one example of entertainment affecting religious practice, see Lutgendorf, "*Jai Santoshi Maa* Revisited," 19–42.

[11] See Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 13–15. Low levels of professed belief in Japan are likely related to this narrow definition, which has a convoluted history of usage both in contrast to and in conjunction with institutionalized religions.

[12] See Swyngedouw, "Religion in Contemporary Japanese Society," 49–55, 60–70. This discrepancy between belief and practice is largely related to the problematic application of the older Buddhist term *shûkyô* to the English "religion" in the nineteenth century. See Helen Hardacre, *Shintô and the State: 1868–1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 65.

[13] Shimazono, quoted in Hamada, "Kamisama wa imasu ka?" 45.

[14] See, for example, YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô" 現代日本の宗教 [Contemporary Japanese Religion], in INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, ed. *Gendai nihon no shûkyô shakaigaku* 現代日本の宗教社会学 [*Sociology of Religion in Contemporary Japan*] (Tokyo: Sekaishisô Press, 1994), 94—130, especially 106.

[15] See SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進, *Seishin seikai no yukue: shûkyô, kindai, reisei* 精神世界のゆくえ—宗教・近代・霊性 [*Whither the Spiritual World: Religion, Modernity, and Spirituality*] (Tokyo: Akiyama Shoten, 2007); *Supirichuariti no kôryû: shinreisei bunka to sono shûhen* スピリチュアリティの興隆—新霊性文化とその周辺 [*The Rise of Spirituality: New Spirituality Culture and its Periphery*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007); quoted in Hamada, "Kamisama wa imasu ka?" 45.

[16] Yumiyama, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô," 110.

[17] I am indebted to Paula Arai for emphasizing the difference between the nominal "religion" and the adjectival "religious" in response to the term *shûkyô asobi* at the 2005 AAR Annual Meeting.

[18] Yumiyama, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô," 108–11.

[19] Yumiyama, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô," 111–17, 119–21. While *genze riyaku* 現世利益 have long provided a substrate of Japanese religion—see Ian Reader and George Tanabe, *Practically Religious: World Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 1998, 8–23—fascination with the occult can be traced particularly from the mid–1970s to the present. People apparently did not widely believe in the efficacy of divination (*uranai* 占い) in the early 1980s (Swyngedouw, "Religion in Contemporary Japanese Society," 53), but recently belief in the efficacy or accuracy of divination hovers at around 60 percent, according to HAMADA Nami, "Uranai nippon doko e iku" 占いニッポンどこへ行く [Where is fortunetelling Japan headed?] and "Shôene shikô no Ehara genshô" 省エネ志向の江原現象 [The energy-saving oriented Ehara phenomenon], in *AERA* (Asahi Shinbun Extra Report and Analysis), vol. 19. No. 9. 27 February 2006, 50.

[20] Yumiyama, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô," 110–15.

[21] Reader and Tanabe point out that anybody may utilize a temple for the acquisition of worldly benefits, regardless of affiliation (*Practically Religious*, 8). They also point to acquisition of worldly benefits as the underlying common religion of Japan (*Practically Religious*, 23–32). Elsewhere, Reader points to the influence of occult literature on the membership of Aum Shinrikyô オウム真理教. See Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyô* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i

Press, 2000), 96–104, especially 100. The recent boom in divination and *supicon* スピコン (an abbreviation of the English words "spirituality convention," large meetings focused largely on divination and healing practices, apparently most often frequented by women but open to all) suggests that these are also major elements in the larger movement away from formal religion and to a less restrictive spirituality. On these trends, see Hamada, "Uranai nippon doko e iku?" 46–52.

[22] The term is explained in Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 293–305. I would include among these *supicon* (spirituality conventions), divination, magic, healing and occult literature. For a more detailed explanation of the terminology, see Shimazono, *Seishin seikai no yukue*; *Supirichuariti no kôryû*.

[23] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 297.

[24] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 305.

[25] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 299–305.

[26] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 302–3.

[27] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 303. Also see SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進, "*Sei no shôgyôka: shûkyô hôshi to zôyo no henyô*"聖の商業化—宗教奉仕と贈与の変容 [The Commercialization of the Sacred: The Transfiguration of Religious Service and Donation], in SHIMAZONO Susumu and ISHII Kenji 石井研士, eds. *Shôhi sareru <shûkyô>* 消費される＜宗教＞ [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 88—110. Shimazono's article describes the transition within the new religions from a "parent-child" model to a "consumer-producer" model, and I believe that his arguments are indicative of a general trend in Japanese religious interactions that is not limited to the new religions. Of course Ian Reader and George Tanabe's book *Practically Religious* supports this view, and their emphasis on the affective element of these economic interactions is noteworthy.

[28] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 303.

[29] For another treatment of this term, see Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan: Asakusa Sensôji and Edo Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[30] SHINMURA Izuru, ed. "*Asobu*," *Kôjien* [Dictionary] reference, 5th ed. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), digital version. Ed Gilday has also pointed out to me that the verb is used in a causative-honorific form (遊ばせる) within imperial ritual to describe the ritual activities of the emperor.

[31] Shinmura, "*Asobu*." Although "*bettenchi*" is often translated as "utopia," I feel that "alternate reality" is better in the context of this passage. The fact that the word *yûtopia* [utopia] also exists in Japanese suggests that discrimination between the two in terms of their usage is necessary.

[32] I am indebted to Kasai Kenta of the Center for Information on Religion for his question at the 2005 AAR Annual Meeting concerning the level of meaning of "*asobu*" used in *shûkyô asobi*, as well as to my instructors Otake Hiroko and Kushida Kiyomi at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies in Yokohama, Japan for helping to determine how to properly interpret and present the word here.

[33] Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94–116. I am indebted to George Tanabe for highlighting the experiential element of *shûkyô asobi* in his comments at the 2005 AAR conference.

[34] INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, "The Modern Age: Shinto Confronts Modernity," in *Shinto—A Short History*, ed. INOUE Nobutaka, trans. and adapted by Mark Teeuwen and John Breen (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003 [1998]), 195.

[35] Mark Wheeler MacWilliams, "Japanese Comic Books and Religion: Osamu Tezuka's Story of the Buddha," in Timothy J. Craig, ed. *Japan Pop!* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 109–37.

[36] Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô,"158–84. Significantly, the prime example he uses for the latter is Miyazaki Hayao's *manga Naushika of the Valley of the Wind*.

[37] Meir Shahar, "Vernacular Fiction and the Transmission of Gods' Cults in Late Imperial China," in *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*, ed. Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 193–94.

[38] Lyden, *Film as Religion*, 2–3.

[39] Lyden, *Film as Religion*, 4. Lyden's description is reminiscent of the root meaning of *asobu*, given above.

[40] Lyden, *Film as Religion*, 3.

[41] Lyden, *Film as Religion*, 32–35.
[42] S. Brent Plate, "Introduction: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making," in *Representing Religion in World Cinema*, S. Brent Plate, ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5. Another work that points to the ability of film to change outlook and behavior is Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
[43] Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual and the Media," in *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 220.
[44] Plate, "Introduction," 4.
[45] Lutgendorf, "*Jai Santoshi Maa* Revisited," 22.
[46] Lutgendorf, "*Jai Santoshi Maa* Revisited," 26.
[47] Lutgendorf, "*Jai Santoshi Maa* Revisited," 21.
[48] Plate, "Introduction," 1.
[49] Nasreen Munni Kabir, *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story* (London: Channel 4 Books, 2001), quoted in Lutgendorf, "*Jai Santoshi Maa* Revisited," 19.
[50] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 300–1.
[51] Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 158–84; KITAHARA Naohiko 北原尚彦, *Honya ni wa nai manga* 本屋にはないマンガ [*Manga That Are Not in Bookstores*] (Tokyo: Nagasaki Publishing, 2005), 87.
[52] See Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 24, 300–1.
[53] Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion! The What? Why?& Wow! Of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), 37.
[54] Gilles Poitras, "Contemporary Anime in Japanese Pop Culture," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 59.
[55] INOUE Sizuka 井上静, *Miyazaki Hayao: eizô to shiso no renkinjutsushi* 宮崎駿—映像と思想の錬金術師 [*Miyazaki Hayao: Alchemist of Image and Thought*] (Tokyo: Shakai Hihyôsha, 2004); SHIMIZU Masashi 清水正, *Miyazaki Hayao wo yomu: bosei to kaosu no fantashii* 宮崎駿を読む—母性とカオスのファンタジー [*Reading Miyazaki Hayao: Fantasies of Maternity and Chaos*] (Tokyo: Chôeisha, 2001); McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*; Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke.*
[56] MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿, dir., *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* 風の谷のナウシカ [Naushika of the Valley of the Wind], 1984. Incidentally, I have chosen to transliterate the protagonist's name as "Naushika" to compensate for discrepancies in scholarly literature—some scholars choose to render it closer to the Odyssean character upon which the heroine is allegedly based (Nausicaä) while others drop the umlaut (Nausicaa), but I find the safest rendition to be a straight transliteration from the Japanese.
[57] MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿, dir., *Tonari no Totoro* 隣のトトロ [My Neighbor Totoro], 1988.
[58] MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿, dir., *Mononoke hime* もののけ姫 [Princess Mononoke], 1997.
[59] MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿, dir., *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* 千と千尋の神隠し [Spirited Away], 2001.
[60] McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*; Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*; Boyd and Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives;" Wright, "The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki."
[61] Lucy Wright and Jerry Clode, "The Animated Worlds of Hayao Miyazaki: Filmic Representations of Shinto," Metro Magazine No. 143, 2004, 46—51.
[62] Boyd and Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives;" Wright, "The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki."
[63] MASAKI Akira 正木晃, *Hajimete no shûkyôgaku: "Kaze no tani no naushika" wo yomi toku* 初めての宗教学—『風の谷のナウシカ』を読み解く [*Beginning Religious Studies: Reading "Naushika of the Valley of the Wind"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2001); and *Obake to mori no shûkyôgaku: tonari no totoro to issho ni manabô* お化けと森の宗教学——隣のトトロと一緒に学ぼう [*The Religious Studies of the Spirit and the Forest: Let's Learn Along With Our Neighbor Totoro*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2002).
[64] Inoue, *Miyazaki Hayao: eizô to shiso no renkinjutsushi*, 99—121.

[65] Shimazono treats the issue of secularization well in his article "Spirit Belief" in *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 164–77. However much "secularization" progresses, there is a countervailing trend that maintains and reinvents spirituality. See also Swyngedouw, "Religion in Contemporary Japanese Society," 67–70.

[66] Wright, "The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki," 1 (my page numbering).

[67] Boyd and Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives," 8 (my page numbering).

[68] Hiroshi Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live': The Significance of the Miyazaki Phenomenon," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 252—253.

[69] Plate, "Introduction," 1.

[70] Quoted in McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*, 89.

[71] These attitudes are generally representative of the types of thought Shimazono describes in his chapter on "New Spirituality Movements and Culture." Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 293–305. On Miyazaki's nostalgia, see Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" and Shiro Yoshioka, "Heart of Japaneseness: History and Nostalgia in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

[72] From the *Japan Times Weekly*, 28 September 2002, cited in Boyd and Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives," 5 (my page numbering).

[73] Wright, "The Nature Vision of Hayao Miyazaki," 2 (my page numbering). Wright's use of the word "spiritualism" is inexact; it seems that she actually means "spirituality" in this instance.

[74] Quoted in Elisabeth Vintacelli, "Bittersweet Symphonies," *The Village Voice* (27 October–2 November 1999): 3 (my page numbering), <http://www.villagevoice.com/film/9943,vincentelli,9453,20.html>. Also see Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 251.

[75] Tom Mes, Hayao Miyazaki Midnight Eye interview, 7 January 2002, 5 (my page numbering), <http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/hayao_miyazaki.shtml>.

[76] Miyazaki, *Tonari no Totoro*

[77] McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*, 120–21.

[78] McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*, 122.

[79] *Totoro* are not just refashioned, but also fashionable kami, if the ubiquitous mass-marketed stuffed *totoro* are any indication. This is no doubt related to the *kawaii* [cute] aesthetic relentlessly propagated in Japanese consumer culture. See Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 251.

[80] McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*, 122.

[81] MIXI (Online Blog Community) Miyazaki fan site, available by membership only. A person identifying herself as Soppi (post #13) wrote on a thread started by *Yuhi*: *Miyazaki kantoku eiga no eikyô wa?* [What is the influence of director Miyazaki's movies?] *Miyazaki Hayao kantoku eiga no nazo wo tsuikyû/kaimei* [Pursuing and elucidating the mysteries of director Miyazaki Hayao's films], <http://mixi.jp/view_bbs.pl?id=3413393&comm_id=290365>, accessed 2 January 2006. This link is no longer active, and the entire thread has been removed from the community page. Presumably the discussion moderator found some of the content objectionable or outdated. Other threads, cited below, may also become inactive at a later date. The MIXI links cited are fully accessible once one has logged into the MIXI site. Using MIXI requires the ability to read Japanese. Readers who have difficulty navigating the site should contact the author.

[82] Yamanaka, "*Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô*," 158–84, esp. 175–81. The *anime* is a simplified version of the *manga*, but retains the same religious tone.

[83] Yamanaka, "*Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô*," 176.

[84] Yamanaka, "*Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô*," 181.

[85] Shimizu, *Miyazaki Hayao wo yomu*, 133–37.

[86] Shimizu, *Miyazaki Hayao wo yomu*, 141–42.

[87] Interview with Charles T. Whipple, "The Power of Positive Inking," n.d., 8–9 (my page numbering), <http://www.charlest.whipple.net/mangamiyazaki.html>, initially accessed 15 January 2005. Attempts to contact the author for the date of writing have thus far been unsuccessful. Based on the content of the

article, cross-referencing the movies it mentions with their dates of release, it seems to have been written in late 1994.

[88] Miyazaki, cited in TAKEUCHI Osamu 竹内オサム, *Tezuka Osamu ron* 手塚治虫論 [*On Tezuka Osamu*] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 12. Translation mine.

[89] See, for one example, the MIXI (Online Blog Community) message board entitled "Studio Ghibli" at <http://mixi.jp/view_community.pl?id=139456,> initially accessed 22 April 2005. Also see Nausicaa.net, <http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/>, initially accessed 15 November 2004.

[90] MIXI (Online Blog Community) Miyazaki fan site. Thread by Airinsachi (Kekaha), *Naushika no saigo wa...* [The end of Naushika...], *Miyazaki no nazo wo tsuikyû/kaimei*, <http://mixi.jp/view_bbs.pl?page=1&comm_id=290365&id=1884432>, accessed 1 September 2005. See particularly the series of posts by Hajime (#6), Airinsachi (Kekaha) (#7, #10), Hibachi (#8), and Kenji (#9).

[91] Airinsachi (Kekaha),"The end of Naushika...", *Miyazaki Hayao no nazo wo tsuikyû/kaimei*, <http://mixi.jp/view_bbs.pl?page=1&comm_id=290365&id=1884432>, accessed 1 September 2005. This is post #7, by topic starter Airinsachi (Kekaha).

[92] Personal interview, 28 June 2007.

[93] *Asia Pulse*, May 1997, cited in McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*, 185.

[94] Napier, *Anime From Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 186–87. Also see Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live,'" 250—251.

[95] Thread by Chunbaa, *Mononoke hime no butaichi* ["The Setting of *Princess Mononoke*"], *Miyazaki Hayao no nazo wo tsuikyû/kaimei*, <http://mixi.jp/view_bbs.pl?id=2444019&comm_id=290365>, accessed 23 October 2005. See particularly the posts by ":) nussy" (#4), Naki mushi no amattare (#6), HHC (#9), and Mamepucchi (#13).

[96] Shimazono points to the popularity of spiritually-infused environmentalism in modern Japan, in *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 175.

[97] Thread by Sunchan, *Sen to Chihiro kantoku no messeeji* [The Director's Messages in *Spirited Away*], *Miyazaki Hayao no nazo wo tsuikyû/kaimei*, <http://mixi.jp/view_bbs.pl?page=3&comm_id=290365&id=2205445>, accessed 2 October 2006. See particularly the posts by Hatsubodaishin (#25) EYESEYESNOISE (#9) and Shinrabanshô (#23). The focus on human activity interfering with the ability of the gods to return to their natural homes (rivers, in particular) recurs in the film and is picked up by the message board commentators. Also note that names like Hatsubodaishin [starting on the path towards enlightenment/the prerequisite mindset for enlightenment] and Shinrabanshô [all things existing in the universe] both seem to reflect an interest in spirituality.

[98] On the spirituality of this film, see Yamanaka, "The Utopian 'Power to Live.'"

[99] See McCarthy, *Master of Japanese Animation*, 89.

[100] MASAKI Akira 正木晃, *Hajimete no shûkyôgaku: "Kaze no tani no Naushika" wo yomi toku* 初めての宗教学—『風の谷のナウシカ』を読み解く [*Beginning Religious Studies: Reading "Naushika of the Valley of the Wind"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2001); and *Obake to mori no shûkyôgaku: tonari no totoro to issho ni manabô* お化けと森の宗教学——隣のトトロと一緒に学ぼう [*The Religious Studies of the Spirit and the Forest: Let's Learn Along With Our Neighbor Totoro*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2002).

[101] Masaki, *Hajimete no shûkyôgaku*, i.

[102] Masaki, *Hajimete no shûkyôgaku*, iii.

[103] Susan Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," Frenchy Lunning, ed. *Mechademia vol. 1: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*, 51.

[104] Napier explicitly uses the word "ideology" to describe the messages of "MiyazakiWorld." See Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," 53.

[105] Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," 57.

[106] See Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 15–16; and on how "spiritual sells," see chapters 5 and 6 of their book.

[107] These posts obviously represent only those fans motivated enough to participate in an online forum, and make up merely a fraction of the information available from and about Miyazaki fans.

[108] Shimazono, *From Salvation to Spirituality*, 303.

[109] Certainly, this has come to the fore in previous works on Japanese religion, such as Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 206–55.

[110] See Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 161–63; Kitahara, *Honya ni wa nai manga*. Kitahara picks up ten examples in his section on religious *manga*, two more in a section on Cosmomate—also known as Worldmate—and touches upon the apologetic *Skyandaru!* [Scandal!] written about Sôka Gakkai leader Ikeda Daisaku's rape accusations.

[111] Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 162. Aside from being relatively dogmatic, this type of *manga* sometimes reflects a lack of inspiration on the part of the authors (who are not necessarily adherents) who have been commissioned to create the work.

[112] Kitahara, for example, treats religious *manga* as an oddity, in *Honya ni wa nai manga*, 87.

[113] Shahar's treatment of the Chinese *xiaoshuo* and their influence on popular religion is suggestive, in "Vernacular Fiction and the Transmission of Gods' Cults in Late Imperial China," 193–94. Lutgendorf's portrayal of *Jai Santoshi Maa* is also a good example, "*Jai Santoshi Maa* Revisited," 19–42.

[114] Ian Reader pointed out to me the similarity between *shûkyô asobi* and the phrase *ibento shûkyô* イベント宗教[event religion], used to refer to large religious events that are equally focused on spectacle (e.g., festivals and parades), which he suggests has been widely used in Japanese academic circles, particularly Shûkyô Shakaigaku no Kai 宗教社会学の会 [The Society of the Sociology of Religion]. Personal email communication, 24 February 2005, and 14 April 2005.

On the subject of *ibento shûkyô*, see Ian Reader, "Recent Japanese Publications in Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, no. 4 (December 1989), 299–315. See particularly the section on ÔMURA Eishô 大村英昭 and NISHIYAMA Shigeru 西山茂, eds. *Gendaijin no shûkyô* 現代人の宗教 [*The Religion of People Today*] (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1988), 308–12. I suspect that *ibento shûkyô* may be based a bit more on an opposition of the categories "religion" and "events" than *shûkyô asobi*, but certainly the parallel is striking and worthy of investigation.

CHAPTER 5. THE AESTHETICS OF EXTREMITY

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN *MANGA*

It is virtually impossible to discuss the current state of Japanese religion and religious consciousness, inclusive of spirituality culture,[1] without touching upon Aum Shinrikyô オウム真理教 (hereafter, simply "Aum"), the group responsible for the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in March of 1995. In the aftermath of the attack, religions in general, and particularly new religions, have come to be associated with violence, brainwashing, and fraud. While attitudes towards religions were not overwhelmingly positive in Japan prior to March 1995,[2] Aum has undoubtedly contributed to the creation of relatively negative images and impressions of religions since.[3]

This chapter examines the culture of religious information that served as a base for Aum's thought and as a meeting point for Aum members prior to and during the expansion of the group in the 1980s and early 1990s, and then examines how that culture has changed since Aum's murderous and terrorist activities came to light in 1995. As a barometer of these changes in discourse about religion, I examine several *manga* series published and serialized before Aum's establishment, during its rise, and after its dissolution. The *manga* that served as a base for the Aum membership reflected a focus on apocalyptic themes and the potential to create a new world order through the actions of a small group of people wielding supernatural powers. Aum itself produced *manga* and *anime* that tended to follow this trend, although it minimized the adventure aspects of stories in favor of focusing on doctrine, conversion stories, the acquisition of spiritual

powers, Aum's salvific role in the face of impending apocalypse, and praising guru Asahara Shôkô 麻原彰晃.[4] In contrast, some *manga* published since the "Aum shock"[5] have incorporated evaluations and critiques of groups like Aum, searching to explain the actions of cults and their members. Throughout all of these products religious imagery and vocabulary contribute to the aesthetic appeal (positive and negative) of the works in question, and authors' didactic or polemical orientations are voiced.

AUM SHINRIKYÔ

Asahara Shôkô developed the eclectic yoga group that eventually became Aum Shinrikyô in the mid-1980s.[6] The group's generally well-educated membership shared an interest in the acquisition of spiritual powers and a rejection of previously valued thought systems, including those of established religions and of modern rationality or scientific thought.[7] Not surprisingly, many of these people initially encountered Aum through the spirituality literature of the period,[8] not least among which is the genre of *manga*. *Manga* have often been negatively portrayed as contributing to the (predominantly young and well-educated) Aum membership's sense of apocalypse and estrangement from society.[9] Although Aum's thought—and particularly its violence—was not based entirely or even explicitly upon *manga*,[10] the occult and apocalyptic *manga* that proliferated in the late 1980s and early 1990s undoubtedly matched and also shaped the mindset of potential and actual Aum members.[11]

Aum's millennial outlook, its ideal of the spiritually enlightened and superior being, and its generally anti-secular orientation led to a gradual secession from Japanese society. The small yoga group gradually became a large organization of renunciants

(around 1200, as well as a wider community of householding believers) headed by Asahara and his group of close disciples. Aum commanded several communes throughout Japan where participants engaged in extreme ascetic practices, and eventually where they developed the weaponry that would be used in Aum's holy war against its perceived opponents (secular forces in general, but particularly the U.S.A., Freemasons, Jews, and the Japanese government).[12]

Aum's conflicts with secular society began with lawsuits filed against the group by concerned families of members, escalated when the group purchased the land for a commune against the wishes of the local community, were exacerbated when Aum came under suspicion for the mysterious disappearance of a lawyer investigating the group, and came to a head when Aum members made flashy but ultimately ineffective campaigns for political office.[13] At first through accident, and then intentionally, members carried out *poa* (a euphemism for murder based on a Tibetan word roughly meaning "liberation") in a few smaller isolated cases before moving to indiscriminate terrorism. Aum's sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway on 20 March 1995 led to the deaths of twelve, seriously injured hundreds, and otherwise affected thousands of people.[14]

By late 1995, the media was in an uproar about the dangers of cults,[15] and Japan was generally at a state of high alert regarding religions of any kind.[16] Scholars of religion attempted to trace the history of the spirituality culture that preceded and followed the Aum incident, so crucial to understanding not only Aum, but also the skepticism leveled at secular society and established religions which might lead again to the rise of similar groups.[17] As instructors, scholars also noticed a spike in college

students' interest in religion, but particularly in religion as a social problem.[18] Against this background, *manga* has dealt specifically with the Aum issue in a combination of sensationalism, critique, curiosity, and rational explanation. Before delving into the specifics of how *manga* culture both influenced and has been affected by popular religious thought prior to and after the Aum incident, however, it is crucial to establish some definitions of key terms.

Definitions

Unfortunately there is a paucity of suitable language regarding the role of narratives concerning religion or the religious, particularly fictional narratives based in the present or—in the case of science fiction—in the future. I am therefore appropriating and reconfiguring some older and familiar—if somewhat problematic—terms in order to assess the role and treatment of religion in *manga* (and, incidentally, in other popular literature as well[19]) surrounding the Aum incident.

Cult

The first of these is "cult."[20] I retain a deep suspicion regarding the word "cult," fearing that using the word indiscriminately tends to give rise to misconceptions regarding new religions in general.[21] However, in the present chapter I will use the word in three senses: 1) as a descriptor of violent religious movements that exist in high tension with mainstream society; 2) as devotion to or worship of a specific figure, divine or human; and 3) as exceptional popularity. After describing these nuances in more detail, the remainder of this chapter will use each of them to describe layers of the narratives surrounding the Aum affair.

I believe that "cult" can be safely used to describe religious movements in the first sense mentioned above when two conditions are present: 1) the group displays obvious physically or psychologically violent tendencies beyond those normally associated with other religions; and 2) the group is discursively relegated to the fringes of society as a result of the first tendency. It is important to note that the first condition does not allow for the word "cult" to be leveled at new religious movements (NRMs) or spirituality movements and culture in general, although this mistake is often made with words like "cult" in the U.S.A. and Japan and "sect" in parts of Europe. It is also important to note that "cult" in this sense is confined to an *extremely* small number of groups; Aum Shinrikyô became one of these when it made its turn to violence.

In the present chapter, since I am dealing with *manga* that present images of NRMs that all display violent tendencies and a sharp secession from or rejection of society, I am freely using the word cult to describe the NRMs depicted in the works. This usage adds a third dimension to my working definition of cults—in common discourse (including and especially in literature and journalism) the word and concept of "cult" serve more as narrative and rhetorical devices than as an analytic tools. In the *manga* presented here, "cults" can refer to obviously violent groups such as Aum Shinrikyô, but I am choosing to use the term to point specifically to the existence of such groups in popular discourse as foils for perceptions of "normal" religions or—more frequently—secular society.

A second way to look at the word "cult"—one closer to its original usage—is simply as a group of veneration practices or an organization centered upon a particular

person, place, or story (similar to the *shinkô* 信仰 found in phrases such as *Tenman shinkô* 天満信仰—the cult of Tenman Tenjin 天満天神). In this usage there is the "cult" of leader veneration found in Aum's own literature regarding Asahara Shôkô. This usage is also evident in the "cult" surrounding protagonists within the narrative of certain fictional works—protagonists endowed with exceptional charisma who are surrounded by loyal followers.

A final way to look at the word is its use in the phrase "cult classic" or "cult film." Clearly when used in this fashion, "cult" loses some of its pejorative ring and instead garners a certain amount of validity due to the esoteric or, more often, the *exoteric* appeal of the narrative in question. A "cult classic" derives broad popular appeal from both its esoteric qualities (the rarity or novelty of its content) and its ability to reach various and possibly disparate demographics, or to monopolize the interest of a particular demographic. Due to this latter quality, cult classics are often subjected to detailed exegesis, become the basis for ritual action or repetition of dialogue, or become informally canonized (must-see films or must-read books) or formally canonized (incorporated into the scriptural or liturgical tradition of a religion). This is, of course, related to the ability of vernacular fiction to influence and spread popular ideas, including the ideas of religion.

Myth and Epic

A second pair of terms that I employ below is that of "myth" and "epic." Myth is often used in a pejorative sense to refer to falsehoods or to primitive attempts at history. However, I reject the temporal identification of myth as something that occurs solely in

the past—the creation of myths happens in the present as well. Myths thus serve to explain the world or the existence of something in the world (e.g. cosmogonies, pourquoi stories), and while some of the *manga* discussed below clearly draw upon the myth—in the sense of fictive or false—of new religions as avaricious institutions solely concerned with deceiving followers for the personal benefit of the leaders, they also provide explanations of the origins and existence of cults.

Stories also serve to entertain and inspire through presenting stories about admirable protagonists with exceptional qualities (e.g., exceptional strength or faith, morality, or supernatural abilities in some cases). These narratives, while similar to myth, might be categorized as epic in orientation. Epics act as positive explorations of human potential in extreme situations. Some *manga*, while set in the fictive present (or in the future at times) still relies upon a narrative structure that, like epic (or more precisely, as epic), emphasizes extraordinary circumstances and protagonists who serve as exemplars of extreme moral, religious, humane, or political righteousness. This brings us to the final important concept requiring definition, the aesthetics of extremity.

The Aesthetics of Extremity

The appeal of mythic narratives lies in their ability to explain or to instruct audiences on perennial truths or cosmology; the appeal of epic is its ability to inspire through the examples presented by the superhuman or otherwise exceptional heroic protagonist (and here I encourage readers to recall the power of iconic representation discussed in the first chapter). This last facet is usually achieved through what I am calling "the aesthetics of extremity." Extremism can be characterized as zeal in the

advocacy or embrace of drastic measures, and extremity denotes exceptional or severe circumstances or events. Stories acquire their emotional appeal and ability to inspire via their ability to place their protagonists in extreme situations (floods or nuclear war, for example) and to equip those same protagonists with a combination of moral virtue, dogged tenacity, and exceptional courage and charisma. Villains in myths are likewise extreme in their personality traits; they may very well be the cause or a side effect of the apocalyptic or extreme situations the heroes must face. In short, the extremity of the circumstances (e.g., apocalypse) combined with the extremism of antagonists (e.g., an evil cult [in the first meaning discussed above], an oppressive government) and the extremism of the protagonists (e.g., their commitment to peace, justice, or salvation beyond the bounds of normal reason, to the extent that they suffer persecution or otherwise place themselves in danger) combine to create stories with the emotive power of modern-day epic and the intellectual appeal of explanations of how the world works or how it should work (myth).

The aesthetics of extremity provide the emotional appeal—thrills and chills—of stories based on antagonistic or violent new religious groups, fictional or actual. The aesthetics of extremity also play an important role in myth—both in the historical myths of earlier ages (characterized by cosmogonies and diluvian catastrophes) and in modern narrative equivalents. Epic heroes confronted with extreme situations who manage to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds for the sake of the highest ideals (e.g. justice, freedom, the survival of humanity, reconciliation between humans and nature, salvation) are integral to this aesthetic. Some *manga* that influenced Asahara Shôkô and his

disciples highlighted this aesthetics of extremity through apocalyptic settings and the cult (veneration) of the protagonists, who bring about reconciliation through their moral fortitude.

APOCALYPSE AND PROTAGONISTS' CULTS IN POPULAR *MANGA* PRIOR TO AUM

Manga, particularly apocalyptic *manga*, formed a meeting point for members of Aum, focusing their attentions on impending apocalypse,[22] the limits of science and secularism, and the acquisition of supernatural powers.[23] Some of these *manga*, such as Miyazaki Hayao's *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* 『風の谷のナウシカ』 [*Naushika of the Valley of the Wind*], can be characterized as epic in orientation (in a fashion similar to some religious texts), even though they were produced in a "secular" context.[24] These *manga* utilized religious vocabulary and narrative structures primarily for aesthetic purposes; audiences (like some of Aum's members) later interpreted the content in religious fashion. Part of the appeal of these narratives is the very extremity of the situations in which the protagonists find themselves (impending apocalypse) and the extremity of the same protagonists' commitment to solving the problems with which they are confronted.

Two undoubtedly apocalyptic *manga* seem to have particularly contributed to Aum's worldview.[25] One of these is Ôtomo Katsuhiro's 大友克弘 masterpiece *Akira* 『アキラ』, which apparently profoundly affected Aum's own animators.[26] The other is the *manga* and *anime Kaze no Tani no Naushika* 『風の谷のナウシカ』, of which Asahara is known to have been a fan.[27] *Naushika* even featured in an issue of Aum's

publication *Vajryâna Sacca* just a few months before the sarin gas attack—the article was titled "Gendai no yogenshatachi ga egaku senritsu no kinmirai!" 「現代の予言者たちが描く戦慄の近未来！」 [The Horrific Near Future Depicted by the Prophets of Today!], and included several *manga* series with narratives centered upon the theme of apocalypse.[28] In *manga* like *Naushika* and in the *anime* versions that followed them, prevailing values like rationalism, secularism, and commercial or military progress are sharply called into question, and they both end with the suggestion that a new or another world is possible. The new world order comes about due to the actions of morally superior heroes who wield supernatural powers to save humanity and the whole of nature.[29]

Naushika of the Valley of the Wind

Miyazaki Hayao's 宮崎駿 *manga Naushika*, serialized from 1982 to 1994, forms the basis for the 1984 film of the same title, although the *manga* version is more complex and detailed. Naushika is the princess and de facto leader of a small group of people in a valley relatively safe from the poisonous vapors given off by the spreading Sea of Decay, a large forest of mutated fungi and plants that is populated by giant insects. The earth in Naushika's world has been polluted by an earlier highly industrial civilization, now lost after the apocalyptic "Seven Days of Fire" perpetrated by the "Giant Spirit Warriors" [*kyoshinhei* 巨神兵], thinly veiled euphemisms for nuclear weapons. Naushika, who is a scientist and telepath as well as being royalty, discovers that the giant marauding insects who protect the fungal forest are doing so in order to preserve the forest's secret: the ancient fossilized trees at the forest floor are converting the polluted soil into clean,

usable earth. The poisonous gases given off by the forest are actually by-products of the purification process happening deep below the forest itself. Naushika, one of the few humans truly capable of understanding this process, uses her political influence, exceptional charisma, and supernatural abilities to unify humanity and to help humans to understand their role as cooperators with, not dominators of, nature. In the process, Naushika fulfills her messianic role as the culmination of an ancient prophecy while reluctantly becoming the focus of religious devotion. It is through her unique blend of charisma, supernatural power, and scientific insight (esoteric knowledge) that Naushika is able to finally reconcile humanity with its environment.

The cult (veneration) of Naushika the heroine *within* the story combines with the epic nature of *Naushika* the narrative, featuring a righteous character confronted with apocalypse compounded upon apocalypse. Naushika's heroism derives from her extreme commitment to the reconciliation between warring human groups and between humans and nature; the extreme setting of the story contributes to the epic quality of the work. I have touched upon the varied and numerous religious interpretations of *Naushika* made by audience members and academics elsewhere,[30] so I will refrain from repeating them in detail here. Significantly, however, writer/director Miyazaki Hayao suggests that *Naushika* (the film) inadvertently became religious due to the power of its closing scene, in which Naushika dies and is resurrected.[31]

As Ôsawa Masachi 大澤真幸 has indicated, the members of Aum were hardly immune to the power of this image or to the message of the work as a whole—the salvation of a polluted and deluded world characterized by war and strife would be

understood by only a select few equipped with supernatural abilities and esoteric knowledge. The purification of the same world would happen through the very *source* of the poisonous gases—the fungal forest—that served as the source of toxic pollution in the first place.[32] Although drawing too much of a connection would stretch the limits of plausibility, it is intriguing that Aum's obsession with sarin gas as both threat (Aum claimed to have been attacked with sarin[33]) and expiatory tool[34] seems to have reflected the dual role of the atmospheric gases in Naushika's world as both poisons and purifying agents. Incidentally, the insect guardians of the fungal forest—the giant Oumu—happen to share a homophonic relationship with Aum (both pronounced "Ohmu" in Japanese).

Akira

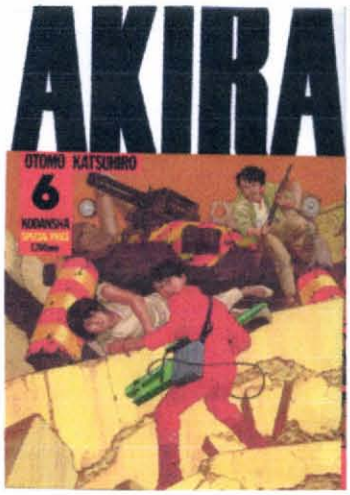

Figure 7: *Akira*

Akira, also a product of the mid-1980s, addresses apocalypse from a different perspective. Government experiments on young children have produced extraordinary psychic abilities—telekinesis in particular—in the subjects, and one boy in particular proved himself to be far too powerful to be let loose. Locked in a cryogenic vault deep below a post-apocalyptic "Neo Tokyo," Akira is the focus of government intrigue and fear. When Tetsuo, a young member of a bike gang, collides with one of the other test subjects, he too is exposed to extensive testing and develops immense psychokinetic powers near the same levels as Akira's. Tetsuo's ability to manage his powers, though, is hampered by his addiction to

drugs and his inferiority complex. Tetsuo frees Akira from his underground prison, but shortly afterward Akira destroys Neo Tokyo in an emotional outburst.

In this post-post apocalyptic city, two groups (both "cults" in the sense of veneration of a leader) vie for power. One is the Neo Tokyo Empire, nominally headed by Akira but managed by Tetsuo, who maintains order through displays of sheer psychic power. The other is the new religion headed by the mysterious Miyako, also a former test subject. Miyako provides healing and food for people in the ravaged city, while training her acolytes in psychic powers necessary for combating Tetsuo's and Akira's more unpredictable and violent telekinetic outbursts. Miyako and her acolytes fight valiantly to control the increasingly unstable Tetsuo, but in the end it is Akira himself who contains the berserk youth, turned monstrous and physically grotesque as his exceptional powers swing out of his control. In Tetsuo and Akira's final apotheosis, Akira absorbs Tetsuo into himself and the two disappear in a scene of fragmentary dialogue. The two merge with the cosmos, emphasizing fundamental connections between all living things and signaling the dawn of a new spiritual and political order on earth, the nature of which is left almost entirely to the audience's imagination.

Again, in *Akira* as in *Naushika* there is a cult (veneration) of certain characters, although in the case of the former the "cult" of Akira and Tetsuo is contrasted with the cult of Miyako and her acolytes (characterized as a formal new religious movement). Akira himself, only a child, is politically benign and entirely lacking in ambition but extremely volatile due to his immense psychic powers. His followers in the Neo Tokyo Empire are attracted to his ability to work miracles or wreak destruction more than to his

charisma. Miyako, on the other hand, along with the other protagonists, serves as a model of a character equipped with both charisma and supernatural abilities of nearly the same order as the two more volatile boys. Miyako is also present for their final apotheosis, explaining the nature of the interconnection of the universe to protagonist Kaneda (Tetsuo's friend who seeks to control his berserk pal) before Akira and Tetsuo vanish in a rapidly diminishing globe of light. Again, the epic nature of the story is created through the extreme situation of a post-post apocalyptic world threatened with total annihilation; the cult (veneration) of the most prominent characters adds an additional layer of complexity within the narrative.

Both *Naushika* and *Akira* play upon themes of apocalypse and religious figures, and interestingly the latter in both cases are presented as a positive solution to the extreme circumstances brought about by the former. Specifically, the protagonists' supernatural powers (such as telekinesis, telepathy and clairvoyance), while occasionally destructive, ultimately provide salvation for ordinary people and the dawn of a new age.[35] These *manga* also criticize secular, rational society—including consumerism and unbridled technological and military development—while valuing alternative, spiritual knowledge.[36] Significantly, these things are traits that scholar of religion Ian Reader points out as common among the young membership of Aum, which sought a retreat from capitalist society[37] and the acquisition of spiritual power through severe ascetic practices, the founding of alternative communities devoted to religious practice, and the creation of a new holy country on earth.[38]

AUM SHINRIKYÔ'S *MANGA*

In the eclectic fashion characteristic of the "new new religions" of Japan and the spirituality culture of the age,[39] Aum drew upon tantric Buddhism, Hindu yogic practice,[40] and messianic and eschatological elements of Christianity; the group's thought also reflected Asahara's time spent as a follower of Agonshû 阿含宗, another Japanese new religion. Aum's members—generally highly educated and yet also exhibiting a strong dissatisfaction with the materialism and social expectations of contemporary Japanese society—seem to have been attracted to Aum because it provided answers at the limits of science and reason, advocated an ascetic technology for the acquisition of supernatural powers, and was headed by a charismatic leader whose most extreme teachings still retained an impressive internal logic.[41]

To attract new followers and to inspire current members, Aum established its MAT (*Manga* and *Anime* Team) studio, where several quite talented amateur artists worked to produce propagandistic *manga* and *anime*.[42] Asahara was a *manga* and *anime* fan,[43] and MAT created both at relatively high volume considering its small staff. Frederik Schodt points to Aum's eclecticism as well as its use of the *manga* medium as part of its success in gaining so many converts. He writes:

> One secret of the cult's success ... was its ability to package its twisted message in an attractive fashion. The teachings are a blend of Hinduism and tantric Buddhism, and—other than the fact that they encouraged blind obedience to a nearly blind guru with apocalyptic visions who is paranoid and psychotic—fairly innocuous. Anime and manga—because they are so popular, because they can be used to dramatize and exaggerate information and simplify a complex reality, and because they were often rendered in a cute, "fashionable" style—were the perfect vehicle for the

> cult to proselytize. ... It is hard to imagine a more sinister abuse of the manga medium.[44]

According to a former member of MAT, however, the doctrinal demands of Aum's leadership often inhibited the artists' ability to make *anime* or *manga* that was enjoyable to watch or read.[45] Because the group had such a reclusive mindset, inspiration drawn from outside sources was treated with suspicion—the entirety of Aum's *manga* was supposed to be drawn directly from Asahara's teachings and treated as scripture.[46] Therefore, the illustrators and animators had little freedom in adding new or exciting elements to the stories, which suffered considerably as a result.[47]

Metsubô no hi 『滅亡の日』,[48] a *manga* that relates Asahara's predictions about the end of the world, claims on its cover: "Asahara Shôkô opens the seal on John's Book of Revelation!!" The story features a flatteringly drawn Asahara putting the Book of Revelation into the context of the late twentieth century, tying in the Biblical message of revelation with his broader tantric orientations and budding messianic aspirations. The *manga* predicts a cataclysmic series of events accompanied by world war; Asahara's theories regarding Islam, the United States, and various other secular forces as contributing to the coming confrontation also feature prominently. Other characters serve as foils for Asahara, asking innocent (and leading) questions and becoming increasingly concerned, then convinced that they must join Asahara in saving as much of the world as possible through proselytization efforts. The *manga* ends with a direct plea to readers to join Asahara and Aum:

> My plan for salvation unfortunately falls a fraction behind each year. This is because my elite (*yûshûna*) disciples from previous lives are still fixated

> (*shûchaku*) upon the present world and have not yet realized the mission for which they were born. Without delay they should recognize that this world is illusion (*mâya*) and gather under me (one of those very same elite disciples may be you, even as you are reading this now).
>
> If all of them could gather and combine their strength, I'm sure that the delay in salvation up until now could be recovered. I want them to come to me quickly; I want them to lend their strength to my salvation movement. After all, their mission is salvation more than anything.[49]

One other type of Aum *manga* that seemed relatively successful was Aum's *Spirit Jump*.[50] In this series, ordinary people find their lives drastically changed and improved by their meetings with a flatteringly drawn Asahara and the teachings of Aum. The title page of the first volume emphasizes the acquisition of supernatural powers, stating: "You can experience it too!" Below, a note says: "Both of these stories are nonfiction." The back pages include contact information for the group, including a list of Aum centers throughout Japan. Frederik Schodt describes these *manga* as follows:

> I was most impressed by *Spirit Jump*, a three-volume set of paperback manga filled with true stories of how various disciples had become disillusioned with their humdrum, spiritually empty lives in modern Japan, joined the cult, and found happiness. The stories are rendered in a variety of styles.... All are remarkably high in quality.[51]

Despite this relatively positive appraisal of the quality of Aum's *manga*, Schodt's description overall is laden with disparaging comments regarding the group and its members (note his use of "cult" in a pejorative sense). His assessment, written immediately after the sarin attacks when anti-cult sentiment was at a fever pitch, shows not only how Aum's *manga* reflected the spirituality culture of its time, but also shows how discourse about religion within Japan since Aum has become increasingly characterized by negative impressions of religions and their adherents.[52] Since the sarin

attack, Aum has frequently been the model for depictions of dangerous cults within entertainment media, including *manga* culture.[53]

POST-AUM MANGA

After Aum's terrorism became widely publicized, *manga* came to provide easily accessible and rational—yet sensational and entertaining—explanations for the behavior of cults (dangerous religious groups) and their adherents. These products combine aesthetic and didactic elements, relating somewhat accurate information about some new religious movements or cults in an instructive manner even as they rely upon the aesthetic thrill presented by cults as a source of violence or social problems.

Some of these *manga* treat cults as fiendishly designed groups based upon leaders' thirst for power and use of mind control techniques. Others focus on the epistemology and psychology of believers and founders, trying to make sense of the ways these people decide to separate from traditional religions or from secular society. A third type criticizes religious institutions and their founders for playing upon people's weaknesses even as they settle upon an epic narrative structure,[54] wherein protagonists with supernatural powers are confronted with apocalyptic crises and work to save the world from destruction.

The Dangerous Cult: Fraud, Sexual Indecency, and Brainwashing in Charisma

Karisuma 『カリスマ』 [*Charisma*][55] is a *manga* rendition of a work by thriller novelist Shindô Fuyuki 新堂冬樹. Serialized in the relatively minor *manga* magazine *Action* 『アクション』, *Charisma* utilizes the well-worn models of brainwashing, intimidation, fraud, sexual misconduct, and violence in its portrayal of cults. Marketed

for its sensational value and horrific content, the cover says things such as: "What would YOU do if the woman you love was stolen by a CULT religion?" and "A CULT RELIGION destroyed a happy family!"

In the story, Heihachirô worries as his mother becomes increasingly estranged and divorced from reality due to her involvement in a cult led by the mysterious leader "Messiah." Heihachiro's father attempts an intervention with his mother, but she goes berserk and stabs him multiple times in the chest with a knife, then rips out his internal organs looking for the "demon" she is sure has possessed him. She then strips off her soiled clothes, and standing naked in front of Heihachirô stabs herself in the groin, pulling the knife up through her abdomen and telling her son, with her last breath, to find the demon in her. Undergoing some cruel ostracization after this incident, Heihachirô resolves to become a cult leader himself in order to enact revenge on the society that created the "Messiah" and his tormentors.

As a "Messiah" himself, Heihachirô utilizes his group to extort money from his followers while sexually abusing his female disciples, setting up exorbitant lecture fees for self-help seminars and retreats that turn into indoctrination and mind control sessions. As Asahara did with Aum, his followers listen to tapes of his sermons or mantras repeatedly. As was the case with Aum, elite members quietly murder followers who question the leader's motives or who attempt to secede from the group. Although believers are instructed to live an austere and ascetic lifestyle, the guru keeps a private room where he drinks alcohol, eats meat, keeps animal hides, and collects pornography (Asahara has also been accused of sexual impropriety). He also maintains a system of

surveillance cameras for watching his disciples, using them primarily to determine which of the women he will select for "special ceremonies."[56]

Early in the story we meet Mami, a young woman who is engaged to a promising young bachelor; Mami's life is going very well except for the fact that her mother is deathly ill. In desperation, Mami turns to Heihachirô's group for guidance. Soon after she has joined, Heihachirô picks her out from among his disciples for an emergency exorcism—Mami is led to a private soundproofed chamber where she is instructed to undress and is blindfolded. Heihachirô has his way with the young woman sexually, convincing her that the ritual is necessary for purifying her and saving her mother. Mami becomes completely enslaved to him thanks to his mind control techniques, so that when her fiancée comes looking for her out of concern she hides behind Heihachirô's bulk while the leader grins at the crestfallen would-be groom and says: "She's not brainwashed... she just may have become prisoner to my penis!"[57]

Heihachirô eventually meets a young housewife, Reiko, who reminds him so much of his deceased mother that he will go to all costs to keep her as a pseudo-maternal figure and as a sexual partner. He murders his high-ranking disciple and former sexual partner and attempts to separate the new woman from her family, effectively doing the same to her as was done to his own mother. He goes to extra efforts to have her participate in "seminars" and "retreats," playing upon her desire to be a better parent so that her son will perform well in school. At first his efforts are successful, and Reiko is completely brainwashed, accepting him as Messiah and fawning over him nude. However, due to the unexpected intervention of another cult leader, Heihachirô loses his

credibility with his disciples and is exposed as a fraud. The rival is none other than the man who had brainwashed his own mother years before, and a final showdown between the two over Reiko ensues. Although the story ends with the triumphant restoration of the woman to her family and to secular society, like any good thriller, *Charisma* ends with the promise of the return of one of these fiendish cult leaders.

Charisma focuses upon sensationalizing the character of the fraudulent and salacious leader, following the pattern often seen in mass media portrayals of Aum leader Asahara Shôkô (and the adult Heihachirô looks suspiciously similar to Asahara, only bald).[58] Ordinary people join the group because of real-world problems or concerns such as curing a relative's illness or performing well in school. Within the cult, however, the avaricious and sagacious leader uses the group as a means for advancing his worldly ends while subjecting his followers to brainwashing or mind control, entirely reshaping their values. This fundamental change in values, combined with the use of esoteric and euphemistic language, leads to an ability to rationalize extortion and murder—extortion becomes "donation" or "seminar fee" and murder becomes "enlightenment" or "release."[59]

Rhetorically, *Charisma* is strongly secularist, serving as a warning to people to avoid not only cults, but also religion in general. It humanizes the ordinary people who are lured into cults while demonizing the leaders.[60] While it does provide some useful information about how groups like Aum function—the use of euphemistic language for murder, for example—overall *Charisma*'s analysis is rather simplistic.

***The Epistemology of New Religious Movements:* Believers**

Yamamoto Naoki 山本直樹 is a *manga* artist known for his explorations of human desire and group mentality—his work has a strong erotic element but also includes social commentary through examinations of group behavior. *Biriibaazu* 『ビリーバーズ』 [*Believers*],[61] which was serialized in the major *manga* publication *Big Comics Spirits* 『ビッグコミックス・スピリッツ』, uses a psychologically and sexually tense narrative to provide commentary on what draws people to cults, delving deeply into the epistemology and motivations of the believers themselves.

The story takes place on a small island off the mainland of Japan. Three young people—two men and a woman—who all share a strong critique of secular, consumerist society, battle with their libidos, with their desires for the comforts of mainland civilization, and with growing confusion and doubt regarding the intentions of their "Teacher." Additionally, as they engage in daily meditation practices and attempts to develop their supposedly inherent supernatural abilities, they all gradually succumb to an inability to distinguish hallucination from reality.

Yamamoto's work portrays the worldview of the cult by introducing various nonsensical words that stand in as euphemistic substitutes for other words (something common to all three *manga* presented here and significant in light of Aum's similar use of euphemistic language). The cult members repeat the mantra "*minna no tame ni ganbarimashô* みんなのためにがんばりましょう [let's work for everybody's sake]" throughout the work. The three young people rely upon nighttime shipments of supplies

from the mainland, and when the shipments become sporadic they are forced to forage for food. In the meantime, they attempt to develop their telekinetic abilities and telepathy, and engage in severe ascetic practices such as being buried up to the neck without food or water for an entire day in order to purify themselves after committing some sort of transgression.

The story spirals out of control when a group of inebriated young people lands on the island and a clash of ideologies occurs. The partiers cannot understand the ascetic attitudes of the believers, who in turn see the mainlanders as depraved, especially when one of them makes sexual advances towards the female member (the Vice Commander) of their small community. With no peaceful alternative, the two men murder the mainlanders. Shortly afterward, the woman and one of the men (Operator) succumb to sexual temptation, despite their vows of celibacy. Also burdened with a vow of absolute honesty, the two guiltily confess only part of their deed to the other man (the Commander). His jealousy and anger lead to the final disintegration of their small community. Ultimately none of the three can resist sexual temptation, especially given the pressure provided by their limited environment and the lack of supplies or communication from headquarters. The initial couple makes increasingly frequent trysts in hidden spots on the island, and the Commander decides that he can only be cured of his sexual desire by confronting it head-on—he forces the Sub-Commander to engage in sexual acts with him in front of the other man as punishment.

The Commander is also slowly losing his grip on reality—after several days of hallucinations brought on by strange foods provided from headquarters, he rambles on

incessantly about a science fiction space opera melodrama he is in the process of writing. The other two recognize that he is growing mentally unstable, and with his repeated demands for sexual satisfaction from the Sub-Commander they fight against him, eventually dispatching him to the mainland and creating an island paradise of two. Effectively seceding both from mainland society and, through relaxing their vows, from their religious group, the two become increasingly confused as their own ability to separate reality from hallucination grows weaker.

Yamamoto's *manga* is notoriously erotic, and *Believers* is no exception. While the story relies upon some accurate information regarding cults, it also utilizes the highly effective narrative technique of sexual titillation to move the plot forward. The passionate time spent by the two lovers draws attention away from their religious affiliation, except for the fact that throughout their discourse and experiences are conflicts with the teachings of their group, the Niko Niko Jinsei Sentaa [Smiley Life Center] or with secular society. The daydream-like quality of their time alone on the island is punctuated by their hallucinations—family members appear and plead with them to return to their former lives, corpses of the murdered intruders haunt their memories.

In the final scenes, a huge group of believers arrives from the mainland seeking refuge from secular antagonists. The group leader distributes glasses of a mysterious liquid to his seated followers (reminiscent of Jonestown) while guards with automatic weapons stand by, saying that anybody who moves will be shot on suspicion of sedition. The leader promises that by drinking the liquid, all of his faithful will be able to leave the polluted present world behind and go to "the land of peace [*anjû no chi* 安住の地]." Just

then, military teams arrive in helicopters from the mainland, the woman disappears, and the young male protagonist (Operator) is captured in the ensuing battle with the authorities.

In prison, still unable to distinguish dream from reality, he escapes into a daydream world where his missing lover still waits for him. Meanwhile, authorities investigating the group trace its origins back to a computer game. The believers, drawn together through a common critique of secular society and a strong desire to escape the consumer lifestyle, banded together through the electronic media they had held in common.

Many critics have isolated *otaku* [geek] culture as the source of attraction to Aum and similar groups.[62] Tracing the source of the religion to video game culture undoubtedly strikes a strange chord with the *manga* audience, not a small percentage of which presumably fits into the *otaku* category (*manga* and video games are equated with *otaku* culture in the popular imagination). These themes also resonate with Aum's membership, who were bound together through a shared interest in occult literature, a dissatisfaction with contemporary society and a corresponding desire to replace the bad "data" of that society with something more "real"—namely, a search for the "true self" and a desire to master the powers they perceived to be working at the limits of scientific explanation.[63] Aum also developed an internal hierarchy that evidently appealed to its young membership, and the characters in Yamamoto's work abandon their secular names in favor of their rank titles much as Aum members took initiation names. Aum also used euphemistic language to refer to murder and to secular society, just as the believers do.

While the argument that *otaku* culture breeds the tendency to become initiated in groups like Aum is not entirely compelling or convincing on its own, *Believers* stands out as a well-researched—if sensational—exploration of some of the connections between young people's dissatisfaction with secular society and isolationist religious groups.

A Twenty-first Century Mythic Narrative: 20th Century Boys

Post-Aum *manga* has used information about religion in an aesthetic fashion (the horrific potential of cults) while providing a sort of education about cult structure and organization, including thinly veiled references to Aum, the People's Temple, and similar groups notorious for their violence. Among the various post-Aum *manga*, some works also return to an epic narrative framework (in the use of heroes with supernatural abilities who save the world from apocalyptic destruction) while retaining a commitment to rationally explaining cults, their leaders, their adherents, and the fundamental patterns of human behavior that give rise to them.

Figure 8: ***20th Century Boys***

As one example, Urasawa Naoki's 浦沢直樹 work *Nijû seiki shônen* 20世紀少年 (hereafter, *20th Century Boys*, the final two volumes are titled *21st Century Boys*)[64] utilizes a two-tiered aesthetics regarding religion: it both critiques cults and their violent behavior and celebrates its protagonists as complicated and flawed—but righteous and miracle-working—heroes. *20th Century Boys* therefore has an overall narrative structure similar to epic literature, with the salvific activities of righteous and just superhuman

protagonists set against an apocalyptic backdrop.[65] Urasawa's work represents an important aspect of post-Aum religious consciousness, presenting an inspirational story that fuses secularist thought (in its sharp critique of cults) and anti-secularist thought (in its presentation of a modern day epic with mythic overtones). This is particularly significant since Urasawa is one of the most lauded *manga* artists in contemporary Japan; his work has received considerable attention due to its commercial success and to its powerful imagery and content.[66]

Like *Believers*, *20th Century Boys* was serialized in the widely read *Big Comics* magazine, *Spirits*, and it has now run to nearly 5,000 pages in twenty-four volumes. The series is immensely popular throughout Japan, has won prestigious awards, and is due to be turned into a live-action film soon. It boasts a convoluted and intriguing plot, an element of foreboding associated with a mysterious evil genius, and irrepressibly likeable protagonists.

Figure 9: Tomodachi in Youth

In the story the villain, known only as "Tomodachi" トモダチ [Friend, 友達], starts a cult with a clearly stated purpose of world domination. The Tomodachi's identity remains in doubt throughout most of the series (he always wears a mask), although it is clear that he is a childhood acquaintance of the

protagonists. Through his organization, the Tomodachi effects psychological, physical, and political control of Japan and—eventually—the entire planet.

Ironically, this evil organization was actually dreamed up by the protagonist Kenji in a childhood fantasy. In the summer of 1969 Kenji and his friends, influenced by the apocalyptic themes they find in *manga* and films, dream of their adult selves as superheroes who save the world from imminent destruction. The friends create a logo for their group of heroes and while away summer afternoons in their secret hideout dreaming up horrific catastrophes that might demand their heroic intervention. Giant robots equipped with lasers and biological weapons, a deadly virus that wipes out huge parts of the world's population, flying saucers spreading panic—these themes become the fantasies of the childhood friends.

For the boys, rock and roll and love and peace (symbolized by the 1969 Woodstock music festival), and the power of science (evidenced in the 1969 moon landing and the various exhibits at the 1970 Osaka Expo) are the quintessence of the twentieth century. They envision their future selves living in a futuristic world filled with technological wonders and powered by a hard-driving rock and roll soundtrack. Yet as they grow older they forget about their passion for peace and justice—Kenji pursues a dead-end career as a rock musician, Occho becomes a selfish salaryman with no time for his son, Yoshitsune is a timid salaryman with no ambition, and so forth.

The story actually begins in 1997, with Kenji working a miserable job as the manager of a convenience store, responsible for the well-being of his niece (abandoned by his older sister) and harried by the franchise parent corporation. Within this endless

daily grind, Kenji gets word of the mysterious and uncharacteristic suicide of a childhood friend, Donkey. As Kenji attempts to pursue the mystery of Donkey's death, he runs into the logo of the heroic organization from his childhood fantasies. Soon he discovers that a secret organization called the Tomodachikai 友達会 [literally, Friends' Society] is using the mark as its logo. The leader of the group, known only as "Tomodachi," is clearly a figure from Kenji's childhood. He knows details about Kenji's past, and claims to be the father of Kenji's niece.

Tomodachi, appropriating Kenji's childhood plot, creates a real evil organization to fight against Kenji and his friends, utilizing the logo they had created for their group of futuristic heroes (the logo is on the mask worn by Tomodachi in Figure 9). Through contacts in the police department and political influence, the influential Tomodachi turns Kenji and his group into a mob of terrorists. The friends retreat to lives underground, sharing abandoned subway tunnels with the city's homeless. Tomodachi threatens the world with extinction by releasing dangerous biological weapons on New Year's Eve 2000, and Kenji and the other childhood friends, having abandoned their careers and their lives, take a stand against him. The last scene before a major temporal transition is the seven of them striding purposefully toward the giant robot (modeled on Kenji's childhood drawings) that is spraying an Ebola-like virus throughout Tokyo. Later it becomes clear that the Tomodachikai would blame Kenji and the other men and women for the robotic terrorism, and that through its provision of vaccine for the citizens of Tokyo and the world the Tomodachikai is able to secure political control of Japan.

Fast-forward to the future. The year is 2014, and Kanna, Kenji's niece, is working as a delivery person for a Chinese restaurant in a dangerous section of the city (Kabukichô 歌舞伎町). Teenaged Kanna is clearly exceptional—she speaks Thai and Chinese, displays extraordinary charisma (in one of her first appearances as a teen she fearlessly steps between flying bullets and chastises rival gang members in their respective languages, putting an end to the fight), and also has preternatural luck—later we discover that Kanna actually has telekinetic abilities and an unusual degree of empathy. The world in which Kanna lives is one mainly run by the Tomodachikai, now a powerful political party. Kanna uncovers a Tomodachikai plot to assassinate the pope on a visit to Tokyo, and she and the other protagonists rush to stop it.

In the days before the papal visit, the Tomodachi himself is apparently killed, causing the world to mourn the loss of its powerful de facto leader. As the pope addresses crowds facing the decorated corpse of the deceased cult leader turned politician, the Tomodachi, in a masterful sleight-of-hand, rises from his bed of flowers, steps in and saves the pope by taking a bullet (fired by one of the Tomodachi faithful) in his stead. Although it is not clear until later how he managed this miraculous resurrection, with it the role of Tomodachi as religious and political leader of the world is secured; the day marks the end of the Western calendar and the beginning of the Tomodachi era.

Yet Tomodachi is not finished, and Kenji and the other protagonists are not dead. Tomodachi again threatens the world with extinction, this time with a true virus spread throughout the world—a huge portion of the human population dies. Yet because the

Tomodachikai has conveniently provided a portion of the world population with a vaccine for the deadly virus, it now controls the entire world through fear, propaganda, and careful policing. In this sense, Urasawa's work moves far beyond the other works described in this chapter, since it presents the kind of utopia (dystopia?) a new religion would make given the resources and opportunity to do so.

Kanna survives as the leader of an underground resistance movement, and she occasionally has contact with her "Uncles"—Kenji's childhood friends. Meanwhile, Kenji himself, presumed dead for years, returns from the outskirts of Japan on a motorcycle with only a guitar and apparently no memory of anything from before. While all of this is going on, other characters revisit the childhood memories of Kenji and the other boys through virtual reality simulations. One of these is Izumi Kyôko, a hapless high schooler who attends the same school as Kanna, and who happens to get wrapped up in the underground resistance movement. Kyôko travels to the summer of 1970, where she encounters the childhood versions of some of the men she has met in the underground. Between these virtual trips to the past and the inexorably developing future, Urasawa's narrative describes not just the potential for religious groups to use violence (like Aum) or to seek political power (as in the case of Aum, and of Sôka Gakkai through the Kômeitô), but also the potential for human beings to become cowed by fear or buoyed by feelings of cohesion—the world that the Tomodachi develops reflects his inferiority complex from childhood as well as the human tendency to band together under strong leadership, even if it is false or evil.

This latter point is clear, for example, in a flashback scene where a character describes helping another follower winch Tomodachi up so that it appears he is floating. A simple ruse to promote faith among credulous followers early in Tomodachi's career as a religious leader, the character realizes the true power of Tomodachi's illusion when the other assistant, holding the rope that anchors the floating man, looks up and says: "he really *is* floating!"

People in the glorious future the Tomodachi has provided for them live in ramshackle housing in constant fear of overzealous police and alien invasions. Meanwhile Tomodachi, fanatic about the promise of future technology found in his beloved *manga* from childhood, spends considerable amounts of money and energy on developing laser guns, flying saucers, and photon bombs. In this way Urasawa also plays upon the tendency of groups like Aum to occupy spaces rooted in fiction as much as in reality, tracing problems to geek culture in his own way.

Urasawa's work maintains the "evil cult" theme by presenting a cult as the cause of the impending apocalypse (on three separate occasions), but also relies on the model of a small group of protagonists equipped with supernatural powers saving the world. Over the course of the story many of these protagonists display some sort of superhuman quality—they are variously clairvoyant, telekinetic, equipped with supernatural strength or charisma, or even resurrected from the dead.

In contrast to these heroes, although Tomodachi does seem to display supernatural powers, time and again his abilities are revealed as nothing more than a sham, further emphasizing suspicion regarding "religion" and rhetorically reinforcing the true abilities

of the protagonists. Urasawa is therefore able to both criticize cults as evil organizations and to simultaneously celebrate the use of supernatural powers in extreme situations. This latter element draws his work close to an epic narrative structure, especially in light of the persecution of the protagonists by the Tomodachikai, which lends an added urgency to the righteousness of their mission.

Kanna

The character that undoubtedly displays the greatest collection of powers is Kanna, a young woman who wields an intense charisma capable of binding warring groups together and forging immediate connections with people in desperate times. She can bend spoons telekinetically[67] and also displays the ability to destroy objects with her will in extreme situations. In addition to these supernatural powers, she has an unusual ability to dodge bullets, incredible athletic reflexes, and always wins at games of chance. As the leader of the underground resistance movement known as the "Ice Queen," Kanna is not just obeyed but treated with respect bordering on reverence—many of her followers (largely drawn from among the homeless, gangsters, and other fringe elements of society) would die for her without hesitation. In short, due to the combination of her exceptional charisma, supernatural abilities, and dedication to her cause, Kanna herself takes on a role similar to that of a religious leader, and a "cult" (in the sense of veneration) develops around her.

Kenji

In part, Kanna's authority is derived from her uncle Kenji, the leader of the group of boys in childhood and the source of the moral authority of the underground resistance.

Kenji's disappearance after facing the giant marauding robot at the turn of the century leads to his martyrdom among the underground resistance, and his return late in the narrative functions as a kind of "resurrection." It is Kenji's commitment to justice that serves as continual inspiration for Kanna and the other protagonists, and Kenji's music serves as a point of communion for the underground; eventually one of his songs becomes a hymn of liberation. When groups of citizens finally decide to stand up and resist the Tomodachikai, it is Kenji's music, broadcast from speakers in homes throughout Tokyo, which gives them strength:

> The smell of curry comes to me from somewhere as the sun begins to set
> I wonder how long I'll have to walk before I reach my home
> Will the familiar taste of the croquettes
> at my favorite shop be waiting there for me?
>
> Darkness settles upon the globe
> I'm hurryin' on the road to home
>
> If you wanna say that pigs will fly next year
> then I say let 'em fly all they like
> Like I keep saying, I'll still be here in five years, ten years,
> Even fifty years from now I'll still be here with you
>
> Darkness settles upon the globe
> I'm hurryin' on the road to home
>
> Rain may fall
> Storms may come
> Spears may fly
> Let's all go home
> We won't let anyone stop us
> Nobody has the right
>
> Night comes throughout the world
> All the world is headin' on home

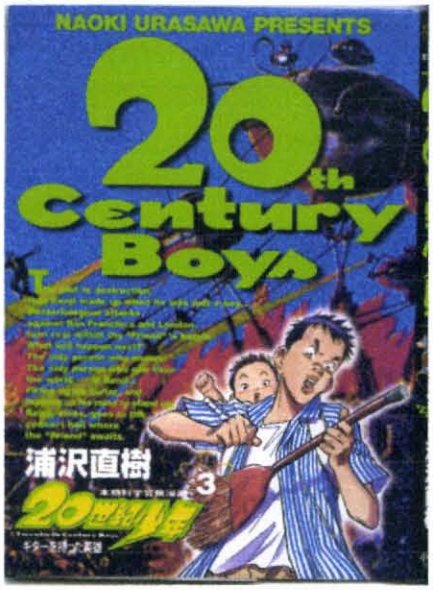

Figure 10: Guitar Hero

I hope that kind of everyday
continues for you always[68]

Like the boys' childhood visions of Woodstock—the themes of love and peace pursued through rock and roll and crowds of people unhindered by fences or boundaries—the people gathered in Tokyo for Kenji's triumphant return abandon fear of authority and gather for the sake of the music, both mournful and uplifting, that Kenji has written (and the song is actually a tune by Urasawa himself, included on CDs in the first printing of volume 11).

The Resistance Community

Gathered around Kanna and Kenji are a group of individuals who have all sworn to end the reign of the Tomodachikai and return peace to the world. In his absence, Kenji's presence is felt through the mythology surrounding his brave attempt to stop the marauding robot at the turn of the twenty-first century—although he has been vilified as a terrorist *responsible* for the death and destruction due to the influence of the Tomodachikai, to the resistance community he is hailed as a martyr. Kanna serves as de facto leader in Kenji's absence, and here her exceptional charisma allows her to act as a political and religious leader—her followers will offer their lives on her behalf if she asks. Kenji's music acts as a hymn for the group, and they all sing the wordless refrain, "la la lala la," as a way of encouraging themselves in adverse situations. A homeless clairvoyant man who is called Kamisama (a Japanese word of reverence for deities or spirits, 神様) joins the fight against the Tomodachikai by giving prophecies to the protagonists, becoming a central figure among Kanna's followers. In short, the resistance

movement, due to a combination of the persecution it suffers under the Tomodachikai government, the mythology surrounding Kenji's martyrdom, Kanna's charisma and telekinetic abilities, and Kamisama's prophecies, takes on the character of a religious organization itself. It is, in a word, cultic (again, in the sense of veneration).

The Religiosity of 20th Century Boys

Considering the fact that its members are persecuted and reviled by the wider society in the post-apocalyptic world managed by the Tomodachikai, and considering the fact that it does resort to violence for the sake of peace and justice, the group of protagonists can be considered a cult (in the first meaning described above) devoted to Kenji's memory and headed by Kanna. Within the group the story of Kenji's heroism and the power of Kanna's charisma, the appeal of Kenji's music and the fervent commitment to the cause displayed by all of the members act as markers of the group's religiosity. At the same time, because these characters are the protagonists of the story (and thus necessarily righteous), the audience perceives them not as cult members, but as unjustly persecuted heroes. The cult (veneration) of Kanna and Kenji is thus not immediately nor explicitly equated with the (violent) cult that serves as a foil for their heroism (the Tomodachikai). Because of this, *20th Century Boys* (the *manga*) itself also acts in an epic or parabolic fashion—the extremism of the plot elements (apocalypse, indiscriminate terrorism, fervent devotion to a cause by both the Tomodachikai and the protagonists' resistance movement) is precisely the appeal of the story. Furthermore, the huge popularity of the *manga* and the proliferation of exegesis surrounding the most mysterious elements of the story (namely, the actual identity of Tomodachi) also places it

in the third usage of cult given above: *20th Century Boys* has become a "cult classic." As such, *20th Century Boys* speaks to something its audience craves, and I argue that it is both an explanation of how cults like Aum come to be, and a narrative characterized by the aesthetics of extremity—the extremity of righteous heroes staving off certain apocalypse—that the audience desires.

While Urasawa and his fans would no doubt downplay or deny the possibility of the *manga* itself having a religious nature or serving a religious function, from the perspective of religious studies it is interesting to note that Urasawa's narrative techniques have contributed to the story's mythic and epic qualities. That is, if myth can be defined as a story explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and an epic often involves exceedingly tenacious supernatural heroes or events faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, then *20th Century Boys* is a contemporary myth that seeks to explain (at least partially) the existence of cults and—possibly—religious terrorism through fiction while still retaining the entertaining and inspiring qualities associated with heroes who exhibit unwavering devotion to a cause (the aesthetics of extremity characteristic of epic literature).

Implications

Urasawa's story also harbors implications regarding human nature and its attraction to religion. The protagonists, in their desperation to save the world as they see fit, are turned into terrorists by the forces arrayed against them. In the dystopia created by the Tomodachikai they are treated as villains, criminals, and radical fringe elements. They collect weapons, organize underground movements, and resort to violence on many

occasions. They act to save the world by whatever means necessary for the sake of their perception of peace and justice.

Urasawa has deftly placed his protagonists into the double role of spiritual heroes and terrorist martyrs for a cause; this cause is one with which the audience necessarily identifies. In the early twenty-first century, which has already been characterized by so much religious violence and terrorism, Urasawa's work hits home as both a celebration and condemnation of humanity's tendency towards religious thought and the ideal of fighting for justice, however it might be perceived.

Hypotheses

My request for an interview with Urasawa was declined, so unfortunately I cannot directly share his thoughts on this particular work. Urasawa speaks primarily through his work, not about it, and so we can only hypothesize about his underlying motivations as follows. First, it seems clear that the Aum Shinrikyô incident served as a model for part of Urasawa's narrative.[69] I also speculate that another major point in contemporary religious history—the destruction of several buildings in the United States on 11 September 2001 and the continuing aftereffects that have embroiled multiple countries and their citizens in wars on terror, axes of evil, and continuing and escalating acts of indiscriminate terrorism—also contributed to Urasawa's depictions of

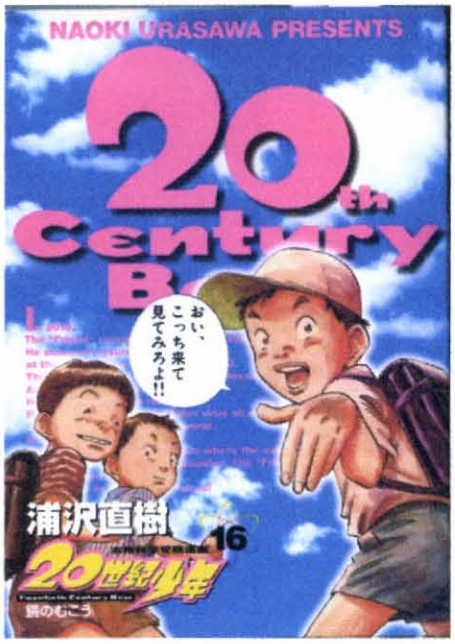

Figure 11: Urasawa's Invitation

the future world run by the Tomodachikai. Urasawa *has* publicly expressed frustration that fans have focused more on the mystery of the Tomodachi's identity than on the point of his story,[70] and I further surmise that Urasawa's frustration lies in his hope that his readership might pay attention to the tension created in the story by the very *anonymity* of the character—because Tomodachi could be anyone, he could just as easily represent *everyone*.

Urasawa's work thus undermines the tendency to utilize aberrant (violent) cults as foils for an apparently "normal" secular society and—intentionally or not—draws his readers into the potentially disturbing recognition that their own attraction to Kenji, Kanna, and their cause (albeit fictional) may be frighteningly similar to the narratives created by Asahara Shôkô, groups like Aum Shinrikyô, and similar groups past and present. The capitulation of the populace to the Tomodachikai's control of Japan and—through terrorism—the world is also reminiscent of a similar popular capitulation to the cult of State Shinto in the early twentieth century ("cult" in this case because of its violent tendencies—war, imperialist expansion predicated upon religious narrative—and its relegation to the fringe of world society as the only regime in the history of the world to warrant the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent). Urasawa effectively redefines "cult" by undermining the tendency to utilize the term as a foil for "normal" secular society, instead choosing to equate the attraction to cults with the attraction to participation in the extreme events of miracles, apocalypse, or redemption. As one of his characters states relatively late in the story: "It doesn't matter. To them, anything is fine... they just want something in which to believe!"[71]

Another telling exchange happens in the middle of the final volume (the second volume of *21st Century Boys*). Urasawa's thinly veiled self-referential characters, a group of *manga* artists, discuss how to finish the story upon which they are working (perhaps reflecting Urasawa's own internal debates—or debates with his editors—about how to end the narrative):

> Kamata: The protagonist saved the world from crisis!! After that, what do we do?
> Ujiko: What do you think, Mr. Kamata?
> Kamata: Hmmm... If it ends like this it's boring... That's all I know.
> Ujiko: What if the enemy reappeared once more?
> Kaneko: Yeah, like the Terminator or Jason.
> Kamata: OK, and then what finally happens to the hero?
> Kaneko: Does he die?
> Ujiko: I don't want to make him die.
> (Pause)
> Kaneko: Heroes, right... They're heroes at the very instant that they win...
> Ujiko: That moment is the climax, but if they live then there's old age...
> Kamata: That's why the endings you often see in heroic stories are that the protagonist disappears off to somewhere, or.... dies....
> Ujiko: It makes me sad to think that way....[72]

Although Tomodachi is defeated as the story winds to a close, a final nefarious trap is revealed—a photon bomb capable of destroying the world lies hidden someplace in Tokyo, and the giant robot (guided by one of the Tomodachi faithful) reappears as the trigger for the bomb. Kenji again heroically intervenes, and significantly this is juxtaposed with Urasawa's thinly veiled self-referential explorations of what makes a good narrative (the exchange cited above). I argue that Urasawa's decision to finish the story with Kenji's heroic intervention to save the world from the final trap sprung (posthumously) by Tomodachi was based upon his (perhaps reluctant) acceptance of the fact that the audience desired an ending characterized by the aesthetics of extremity.

Finally—and again this is speculative—Urasawa might have decided that this seemingly heroic ending would actually be nearly horrific, for the veneration accorded to Kenji and Kanna and their group has merely replaced, not obliterated, the need (in their fictional world or in ours) for something or someone in which to believe, even at the expense of reason or the adoption of violence. In other words, just as stories in the horror genre nearly always conclude with the return or revival of the fiendish antagonist (the Terminator or Jason, in the exchange above, and obviously in Tomodachi's posthumous trap), in Urasawa's work the superficial triumph of Kenji and Kanna—seen in light of the hypotheses above—may actually indicate the "return" or reappearance of horrific and violent tendencies in his audience, the very tendencies represented in the extremity of the Tomodachikai and its terror.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF *MANGA* AFTER AUM

The three post-Aum *manga* briefly presented here exist on a spectrum in terms of their conclusions about violent cults, their leaders, and their adherents. *Charisma* simply depicts (violent) cults as the product of conniving and lascivious leaders' quests for power. As such, it does little to explain the complex connections between leaders and followers or cults and the surrounding society, except to explain these connections away with the concept of brainwashing. *Believers* makes a stronger case by rhetorically tying the believers' motivations for joining the group back to the everyday media of video games. In the *manga* format this explanation is rhetorically effective because *manga* and video games overlap within *otaku* culture; that culture has in turn been blamed for the rise of groups like Aum. *Believers* also positively benefits from the erotic elements of its

story (also apparent in *Charisma* but absent in *20th Century Boys*), both because many new religions are seen in popular imagination as promoting unorthodox sexual arrangements and because their leaders are often accused or suspected of sexually abusing their disciples (and needless to say it might partially satisfy prurient appetites in its audience).

Yet among these, *20th Century Boys* is undoubtedly the most thought provoking. Urasawa manages to make heroes out of terrorists, turning his protagonists into messiahs and martyrs who fight against an oppressive regime (the world created by the evil cult). The story is ultimately a relativization of values: even as violent cults are criticized, the inherent moral integrity and supernatural abilities—in short, the religious nature—of the protagonists is valorized, and their ability to wield violence for the sake of justice is celebrated.

Conclusions

Because there is precedent for popular entertainment serving as the foundation of new forms of religious practice and belief, it behooves us to pay careful attention to popular culture media such as *manga* that have close connections to religious discourse. In Japan, *manga* provide a window into the complex and shifting relationships between secularism, religiosity, and entertainment that characterize contemporary attitudes towards religious practice and spirituality movements.

First, *manga* and *anime* such as *Akira* and *Naushika* reflect the spirituality culture of the early 1980s, which clearly influenced the thought of the membership of Aum Shinrikyô; these products frequently elaborated upon the themes of apocalypse, messiah-

like figures, and the use of supernatural powers. Second, Aum's own attempts at producing *manga* and *anime* for proselytization reflects the group's recognition of these media as effective tools in disseminating religious information. Third, some *manga* produced after Aum's terrorist activities became widely publicized have played upon the model of the dangerous cult that Aum presented, presenting a clear call for secularism while attempting, with varying degrees of success, to explain the attraction of cults and their internal workings (mind control, the use of euphemistic language, secession from secular society). Finally, however, highly successful, award-winning *manga* like *20th Century Boys* seem to reflect both a secularist critique of religion and a revalidation of the concept of a small group of people armed with supernatural powers working to save the world, taking on a narrative structure and a tone similar to religious stories designed to inspire and instruct.

Although the author himself may not have a specific religious message to transmit, Urasawa's work provides readers with a sobering look at humanity's inclination towards religion. He subtly emphasizes the fact that no matter how much we may criticize specific religious groups for their deception, their fraud, or their violence, we are still attracted to stories that present superhuman, righteous individuals and their unwavering efforts to save the world. The aesthetics of extremity is related to the thrill of narratives depicting religious violence, but it also provides the appeal for the heroism of characters like Kanna and Kenji. The cult of veneration surrounding these protagonists *within* the narrative is intimately related to the mythic structure or function of the narrative itself as a "cult classic."

The twenty-first century has thus far been largely characterized by religious terrorism, but the attitudes towards religion that we can trace through this particular *manga*, at the very least, suggest that authors and audiences are filled with both optimism and trepidation regarding the future of religions, secular society, and their conflicts. The entertainment literature surrounding the Aum Shinrikyô affair reflects the complexity of the interaction between secular society and religion, as well as of seemingly benign religions and those groups that—accurately or not—are labeled as cults. Yet the seemingly discrete or mutually exclusive categories of (evil) terrorist and (righteous) freedom fighter are really two sides of the same coin: the attraction to the pursuit of the highest ideals at all costs through an aesthetics of extremity that is both awe inspiring and—truly—terrifying.

NOTES

An earlier, abbreviated version of this chapter was submitted (in Japanese) for inclusion in the 2008 edition of the annual journal Gendai shûkyô. *The author retains rights to the content.*

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[1] This chapter follows Shimazono Susumu's use of the term "new spirituality movements and culture" in describing the diverse yet related conglomeration of thought and practice characterized by a "religiosity" if not adherence to formal religion. See SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進, *Seishin seikai no yukue: shûkyô, kindai, reisei* 精神世界のゆくえ—宗教・近代・霊性 [*Whither the Spiritual World: Religion, Modernity, and Spirituality*] (Tokyo: Akiyama Shoten, 2007); *Supirichuariti no kôryû: shinreisei bunka to sono shûhen* スピリチュアリティの興隆—新霊性文化とその周辺 [*The Rise of Spirituality: New Spirituality Culture and its Periphery*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007); *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004).

[2] See YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô" 現代日本の宗教 [Contemporary Japanese Religion]," in INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, ed. *Gendai nihon no shûkyô shakaigaku* 現代日本の宗教社会学 [*Sociology of Religion in Contemporary Japan*] (Tokyo: Sekaishisô Press, 1994), 108—110; also INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô: ushinawareta zahyôjiku* 若者と現代宗教—失われた座標軸 [Young People and Contemporary Religion: The Lost Coordinate Axis] (Chikuma Shinsho, 1999), 7—17.

[3] SHIMAZONO Susumu, *Posutomodan shinshûkyô: gendai nihon no seishin jôkyô no teiryû* ポストモダン新宗教—現代日本の精神状況の底流 [Postmodern New Religions: The Undercurrents of the Spiritual Situation of Contemporary Japan] (Tokyo: Tôkyôdô Shuppan, 2001), 1, 16—19. Also see Benjamin Dorman and Ian Reader, "Projections and Representations of Religion in Japanese Media," *Nova Religio* vol. 10, no. 3 2007, 5—12, esp. 6—8; Benjamin Dorman, "Representing Ancestor Worship as 'Non-Religious': Hosoki Kazuko's Divination in the Post-Aum Era," *Nova Religio* vol. 10, no. 3 2007, 32—53, esp. 45—46. Also see Inoue, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô*, 7—17. Inoue describes how the Aum incident led to lowered levels of trust in religion, but also relates young people's continued interest in the "irrational."

[4] See OKADA Toshio 岡田斗司夫, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka? Moto Oumu animeetaa no kokuhaku" フィルムは生きているか？ 元オウム・アニメーターの告白 [Is Film Living? Confessions of a Former Aum Animator], in *Quick Japan*, vol. 3, 1997, pp. 202—213.

[5] See Inoue, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô*, 19—76, esp. 30—38 "The Aum Shock."

[6] A brief but excellent overview of Aum's history and worldview is SHIMAZONO Susumu, "In the Wake of Aum: The Formation and Transformation of a Universe of Belief," in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1995 vol. 22, no. 3/4, 381—415.

[7] For another detailed description of the elements that led to Aum's rise in relation to spirituality culture, see YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, "Kachi sôtai shugi e no ôtô: Oumu Shinrikyô to nyû eiji undo" 価値相対主義への応答—オウム真理教とニューエイジ運動 [*An Answer to Relative Value-ism: Aum Shinrikyô and New Age Movements*]," in ITÔ Masayuki 伊藤雅之, KASHIO Naoki 樫尾直樹, and YUMIYAMA Tatsuya 弓山達也, eds. *Supirichuariti no shakaigaku: gendai sekai no shûkyôsei no tankyû* スピリチュアリティの社会学—現代世界の宗教性の探究 [*The Sociology of Spirituality: The Search for Religiosity in the Contemporary World*] (Tokyo: Sekaishisô Press, 2004), 249—267.

[8] Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyô* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 100.

[9] See Richard A. Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyô and a Panic about Manga and Anime," in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008). Gardner's article, incidentally, deals with some of the themes raised here, although I take issue with the obvious factual and linguistic errors that occur throughout his piece, as well

as with the poor editing; the present chapter was drafted (and submitted for publication in Japanese) prior to the publication of Gardner's chapter. Ian Reader refers to Aum members' interest in the occult as the major impetus for their conversion (*Religious Violence*, 96—101). The theme of apocalypse is quite strong in these media, and Susan J. Napier has focused on it extensively in her book, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2000). Napier points out that the media have unfairly blamed apocalyptic *anime* for Aum's actions (8) but also states that Asahara was presumably a fan of Miyazaki Hayao's *manga* and *anime Kaze no tani no Naushika* (195). Arguably the 1980's masterpieces *Akira* and *Kaze no tani no Naushika*, both in their *manga* and *anime* versions, presented young people with frightening and compelling visions of the future. ÔTOMO Katsuhiro 大友克弘, *Akira* アキラ, vols. 1—6 (Tokyo: Kôdansha Press, 1984—1993); MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿, *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* 風の谷のナウシカ [*Naushika of the Valley of the Wind*], vols. 1—7 (Nibariki, Tokuma Shoten, 1982—1995). As a caveat, however, Shimazono's caution that Aum's violent activities cannot be entirely ascribed to apocalyptic thought is important to keep in mind. See SHIMAZONO Susumu, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei: Oumu Shinrikyô to bôryoku* 現代宗教の可能性—オウム真理教と暴力 [The Potential of Contemporary Religion: Aum Shinrikyô and Violence] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997), esp. 70—88. I believe that the combination of religious eclecticism and millennialism presented by spirituality literature, combined with the pursuit of supernatural powers common to Aum's membership, formed the basis for what became Aum's eclectic philosophy combining elements of millennialism, tantric thought, and guru worship. Shimazono's aforementioned book touches upon these elements.

[10] MIYADAI Shinji 宮台真司, *Owari naki nichijô wo ikiro* 終わりなき日常を生きろ [*Live the Endless Daily Grind*] (Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 1998), 18—20.

[11] Reader, *Religious Violence*, 49—51; Napier, *Anime*, 8. Miyadai claims that Aum cannot be reduced to influence from *manga* culture, but then includes *Naushika*'s publication in his list of important dates in Aum's development. See Miyadai, *Owari naki nichijô*, 36—37.

[12] Reader, *Religious Violence*, 11—12.

[13] See Reader, *Religious Violence*, 126—223.

[14] For a detailed depiction of various people's experiences with the attack, including those of some of the perpetrators, see MURAKAMI Haruki 村上春樹, *Andaaguraundo* アンダーグラウンド [*Underground*]. (Tokyo: Kôdansha Bunko, 1999).

[15] See ISHII Kenji 石井研士, "Jôhôka to shûkyô" 情報化と宗教 [*The Information Age and Religion*], in SHIMAZONO Susumu and ISHII Kenji, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される＜宗教＞ [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996, 185—188.

[16] See WATANABE Manabu, "Opposition to Aum and the Rise of the Anti-Cult Movement," in Mark R. Mullins and Robert J. Kisala, eds. *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society through the Aum Affair* (New York: Palgrave 2001), 87—106.

[17] Yumiyama, "Kachi sôtai shugi e no ôtô."

[18] See Inoue, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô*, 32.

[19] See Philip Gabriel, *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 87—172.

[20] I suggest that readers peruse Stark and Bainbridge 1985 in conjunction with this section. See Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 26—30.

[21] See Shimazono, *Posutomodan shinshûkyô*, 1—9.

[22] See Reader, *Religious Violence*, 50—51. The introduction of the theme of apocalypse in popular spirituality culture has its roots in a boom in millennial thought in Japan in the 1980s, largely prompted by Gotô Ben's 五島勉 numerous translations of Nostradamus' prophetic writings starting from the mid-1970s (see Yumiyama, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô," 112). For a more comprehensive overview, see Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyô and a Panic about Manga and Anime," 201—204.

[23] While I argue here that *manga* formed one element of the background to Aum's thought, I would like to stress, following Shimazono, that it served as a base for Aum's membership, not the substance of Aum's (Asahara's) teachings or religious experience. See Shimazono, "In the Wake of Aum," 382.
[24] Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 175—181.
[25] Although I believe that *manga* culture undoubtedly contributed to Aum's worldview, I hesitate to place, as some others have, the entirety of the blame for Aum's beliefs on *manga* or *otaku* culture. Aum drew eclectically from the various sources available to it, including many of the world's religious traditions. For one treatment of connections between Aum and *otaku* culture, see Daniel Metraux, *Aum Shinrikyô and Japanese Youth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 48—57.
[26] The former head of Aum's MAT group (*Manga* and *Anime* Team) stated that he personally was strongly affected by Ôtomo's works. Apparently the cameraman who worked in MAT had also worked on the *Akira anime* project before joining Aum. The interviewee also discusses the conflict between himself and Matsumoto Tomoko (Asahara's wife), who apparently repeatedly made unreasonable demands on the staff at MAT. Nevertheless, Asahara was reportedly an avid *manga* and *anime* fan. See Okada, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka?" pp. 202—213.
[27] Napier, *Anime*, 195. The former Aum animator interviewed in Okada's article also mentions *Naushika* in passing, indirectly suggesting that although most Aum members found the *manga/anime* highly inspiring, he personally found it difficult to identify with a female protagonist. Okada, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka?" 212.
[28] ÔSAWA Masachi 大澤真幸, *Kyokô no jidai no hate: oumu to sekai saishû sensô* 虚構の時代の果て—オウムと世界最終戦争 [*At the End of the Age of Fiction: Aum and the Final World War*] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 1996), 94. Also see Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyô and a Panic about Manga and Anime," 207—208.
[29] Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyô and a Panic about Manga and Anime," 203.
[30] Jolyon Baraka Thomas, "*Shûkyô Asobi* and Miyazaki Hayao's *Anime*," *Nova Religio* vol. 10 no. 3, February 2007, 73—95.
[31] Miyazaki Hayao 宮崎駿, quoted in TAKEUCHI Osamu 竹内オサム, *Tezuka Osamu ron* 手塚治虫論 [*On Tezuka Osamu*] (Tokyo: Heibonsha 1995 [1992]), 12. The *manga* story continues to develop well beyond this scene, but if anything Naushika's messianic status continues to be emphasized—Naushika is referred to as an "angel" and "savior."
[32] Ôsawa, *Kyokô no jidai no hate*, 93—97.
[33] Reader, *Religious Violence*, 188.
[34] Reader, *Religious Violence*, 196—198.
[35] Aum's membership clearly adopted the same line of thinking. See Shimazono, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*, 29.
[36] See Shimazono, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*, 70—88.
[37] See Shimazono, *Posutomodan shinshûkyô*, 28—36, esp. 33—35; *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*, 70—121.
[38] Reader, *Religious Violence*, 98—101.
[39] This eclecticism is what Inoue Nobutaka has referred to as "hyper-religion," following the metaphor of hypertext, where the user can rapidly pick and choose from the wide variety of religious information currently available in our rapidly internationalizing and decentralized world. See Inoue Nobutaka, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô*, 115—178. Also see Reader, *Religious Violence*, 65. Shimazono Susumu also points to this trend, but points out that even though Aum's worldview was undoubtedly eclectic, its transcendental *cum* introspective focus was unique among Japanese new religions. See Shimazono, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*, 13—14.
[40] See Reader, *Religious Violence*, 65—69; Shimazono, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*, 40—68.
[41] See Reader, *Religious Violence*, 95—125. On the attraction of Aum, see MORIOKA Masahiro 森岡正博, *Shûkyô naki jidai wo ikiru tame ni* 宗教なき時代を生きるために [*To Live a Religionless Age*] (Tokyo, Hôzôkan, 1996), 3—66.
[42] Okada, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka?" 202—213; Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern* Manga (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 228—232.
[43] Okada, "*Firumu wa ikiteiru ka?*" 210; Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 46—47.

[44] Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 230. Schodt's appraisal of Aum's message as "twisted" and of Asahara as "paranoid and psychotic" ought to be taken with a grain of salt. The most "twisted" elements of Asahara's teachings were not intended for the uninitiated and never made it into public until after the sarin gas attack in 1995. Aum's message in its *manga*, from what I have been able to read, was largely focused on salvation activities and conversion stories.

[45] See Okada, "Firumu wa ikiteiru ka?" 207, 210, 213.

[46] On Aum's suspicion of the mass media, see Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyô and a Panic About Manga and Anime."

[47] Yamanaka Hiroshi describes this difficulty in *manga* created by religious institutions specifically for proselytization purposes. Many of these products neglect the exciting elements of adventure stories in favor of focusing on doctrine, consequently pushing themselves to the fringes of *manga* culture. Works that can avoid this process seem to be much more successful. See Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 158—184, esp. 162.

[48] Asahara Shôkô 麻原彰晃, draft, with the "Star of David" ダビデの星 as illustrator, *Metsubô no hi: Asahara Shôkô, 'Yohane no mokujiroku' no fûin wo toku!!* 滅亡の日—麻原彰晃、「ヨハネの黙示録」の封印を解く!! [*Armaggedon: Asahara Shôkô Opens the Seal on John's "Book of Revelation!!*] (Tokyo: Aum Press, 1989).

[49] Asahara, *Metsubô no hi*, 224—225. My translation.

[50] ASAHARA Shôkô 麻原彰晃, dir. AUM MAT STUDIO, *Spirit Jump vol. 1* (Tokyo: Aum Press, 1992).

[51] Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 232.

[52] Benjamin Dorman and Ian Reader. "Projections and Representations of Religion in Japanese Media," *Nova Religio*, vol. 10, no. 3, February 2007, 5—12.

[53] For another analysis of this trend, see Philip Gabriel, *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), esp. 87—172. The major disappointing element of Gabriel's work is that he does not clearly define what he means by "spirituality" or "the transcendent," and therefore his analysis is of limited value to the field of religious studies. As a translator and critic highly familiar with Murakami Haruki's work in particular, Gabriel displays an acute knowledge of Murakami's style and intellectual orientations. Despite its loose definitions, his book is an excellent indicator of the prevalence of themes related to spirituality and religion in modern and contemporary Japan.

[54] Yamanaka Hiroshi describes "scriptural *manga*" in his taxonomy of religious *manga*, suggesting that these kinds of works serve as profound sources of inspiration dealing with the most fundamental problems of human existence. Yamanaka, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô," 175—184.

[55] SHINDÔ Fuyuki 新堂冬樹 (draft), YASHIOJI Tsutomu 八潮路つとむ (adaptation), and NISHIZAKI Taisei 西崎泰正 (illustration), *Karisuma* カリスマ [*Charisma*], vols. 1—4 (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2005—2006).

[56] All of these activities relate directly to the most extreme media depictions of Aum's Asahara Shôkô, with varying degrees of accuracy. See Reader, *Religious Violence*, 36.

[57] Shindô, Yashioji and Nishizaki, *Karisuma* カリスマ [Charisma], vol. 2, 166.

[58] Reader, *Religious Violence*, 36—37.

[59] All of these elements are things that scholars have identified as inherent in the pattern of Aum's various activities. See Reader, *Religious Violence*, 18—19, 217—218.

[60] Shimazono Susumu points out that merely focusing on the activities of cult leaders neglects returning responsibility to the followers who support the leaders as well. See Shimazono, *Gendai shûkyô no kanôsei*, 34.

[61] YAMAMOTO Naoki 山本直樹, *Biriibaazu* ビリーバーズ [*Believers*], vols. 1—2 (Tokyo: Shôgakukan Press, 2000).

[62] See Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyô and a Panic About Manga and Anime"; Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, 46—47; Shimazono, "In the Wake of Aum," 382; also see ÔTSUKA Eiji 大塚英志, *"Otaku" no seishinshi: 1980 nendairon* 「おたく」の精神史—一九八〇年代論 [*The Spiritual History of "Otaku": The 1980s*]

(Tokyo: Kôdansha Press, 2004), 358—371; Miyadai, *Owari naki nichijô*, 18—20; Metraux, *Aum Shinrikyô and Japanese Youth*, 48—56.

[63] Yumiyama, "Kachi sôtai shugi e no ôtô," 249—267.

[64] URASAWA Naoki 浦沢直樹, *Nijû seiki shônen* 20世紀少年 [*Twentieth Century Boys*], vols. 1—22 (Tokyo: Shôgakukan, 2000—2007); *Nijûisseiki shônen* 21世紀少年 [*Twenty-first Century Boys*], vols. 1 and 2 (Tokyo: Shôgakukan, 2007).

[65] On scriptural narrative patterns in *manga*, see YAMANAKA Hiroshi 山中弘, "Manga bunka no naka no shûkyô" マンガ文化の中の宗教 [Religion in *Manga* Culture], in SHIMAZONO Susumu 島薗進 and ISHII Kenji 石井研士, eds. *Shôhi sareru "shûkyô"* 消費される<宗教> [*Consumed "Religion"*] (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1996), 158—184, esp. 175—181.

[66] See, for example, MORI Tatsuya 森達也, "Urasawa Naoki: fukuzatsu de tamentekina nijûisseiki o kanchi suru tame ni" 浦沢直樹—複雑で多面的な二一世紀を感知するために [Urasawa Naoki: To Perceive the Complex and Multifaceted Twenty-first Century], in *Quick Japan*, vol. 59. 25 March 2005, 48—49; MOTOHIRO Katsuyuki 本広克行, "Komawari jitai ga kanpeki na e konte: kono mama toreba eiga ni naru!" コマ割り自体が完璧な絵コンテ—このまま撮れば映画になる！ [The Division of Frames itself forms a Perfect Pictorial Composition: If Shot As Is, it Becomes a Film!], in *AERA Comic: Nippon no manga* ニッポンのマンガ [*AERA Comic: Japanese Manga*] (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2007), 38—39; NHK "Professional," Interview with Urasawa Naoki, 18 January 2007.

[67] Spoon bending was one of the themes that stood at the forefront of the occult and spirituality boom in the 1970s. See Yumiyama, "Gendai nihon no shûkyô," 112—113.

[68] Translation mine.

[69] Inoue, *Wakamono to gendai shûkyô*; YOSHIDA Daisuke 吉田大助, "Mori Tatsuya, Takekuma Kentarô taidan: Urasawa Naoki—ima mo owaranai nijû seiki" 森達也X竹熊健太郎対談：浦沢直樹—今も終わらない'二〇世紀' [Dialogue Between Mori Tatsuya and Takekuma Kentarô: Urasawa Naoki—The Still Unending 'Twentieth Century,'], in *Quick Japan*, vol. 59. 25 March 2005, 50—53.

[70] Interview, NHK "Professional," 18 January 2007.

[71] Urasawa, *Nijûseiki shônen*, vol. 18, 194—195.

[72] Urasawa, *Nijûisseiki shônen*, vol. 2, 86—87.

CHAPTER 6. AFTERWORD

When thinking about connections between religion and other elements of society, we often affix to ourselves an ahistoric viewpoint from which we frequently assume that religious interactions with material and popular culture are things that existed solely in the past (as if they might not or could not exist in the present as well). We also often assume that religion and fiction-based entertainment are discrete categories, despite their similar partially intangible nature, their shared need for an audience, and their use of one another in pursuit of the same. However, the recent proliferation of studies on contemporary interactions between religion and material culture, religion and film, religion and the media, and religion and fiction suggest that these very modern distinctions have finally begun to be questioned and—where appropriate—abandoned.

Manga and *anime*, as I have presented them in this study, are not often "religions" in the sense of groups predicated upon the concepts of doctrine and allegiance to it, although they have given rise to such groups and presumably may continue to do so. They are, however, indicators of the *religious* as it is manifest in contemporary Japan. In the ways they imagine reality and in the ways they imagine (and are imagined by) their audiences, religion and fictional entertainment—perhaps particularly fiction augmented by illustrated images—are largely coextensive. They are narrative, audience, and canon; they can be ritual and liturgy. The comedy and tragedy of human existence, portrayed through an epic aesthetics of extremity, is equally operative in sacred and secular storytelling. Escapism and soteriology are each the obverse of the other; religion is recreated as people recreate.

J.Z. Smith once famously argued that religion is an imaginary construct. There is, he said, no data for religion.[1] But once imagined, a thing is not easily unimagined. The ideas and ideals and images of religion—held by adherents, specialists, scholars, and laypeople alike—cannot be unmade. Rather, popular fiction recreates religion by imagining religious data in any number of possible ramifications. Some of these closely resemble religions with which audiences are familiar. Some stretch the limits of plausibility in their portrayals of formal religious doctrines, characters, rituals, or ideals in informal contexts. Yet the verisimilitude of these data—regardless (or in spite) of its fidelity to tradition—is so entirely convincing that figments become facts and chimera incarnate. In its imagination and in its instantiation through popular fiction, religion is both far more real (in ritual responses to and canonization of popular literature) and far more illusory (in the usage of apparently religious themes by lay producers for aesthetic and pecuniary purposes) than it might initially appear.

While I do not mean to suggest that religion and illustrated fiction are perfectly synonymous, I do argue that they are concatenate. My hope is that this work has been provocative in its suggestion that the religious facets of *manga* and *anime* culture be given serious consideration for their own sake, and not merely for their connection to the official doctrines of established religious traditions (to which authors and audiences might not feel any particular affinity). I therefore encourage others to perform careful examinations of *manga* and *anime* not raised here in order to contribute to the hitherto largely ignored (or inelegantly conducted) study of the religiosity of these media, their producers, and their audiences. Furthermore, the connections between religion and other

forms of art-entertainment to which I have alluded but have not directly addressed should be read as invitations for further interdisciplinary study.

Finally, this study has been designed to indicate the potential of religious studies as a discipline. Studies of the religious do not necessitate studies of formal *religions*. Building upon the research into "spirituality," "emergent religions," and "everyday religion" that have been popular in the early twenty-first century, this research is an example of what I feel to be a somewhat new approach to these subfields within the study of religion but at the periphery of studies of specific religious traditions. The combination of genealogy (tracing the religiosity of modern *manga* and *anime* back to the medieval didactic-aesthetic media of *etoki*, for example), ethnography (the utilization of interviews, surveys, and fan message board commentary), and case studies alongside textual analysis has served the purpose of taking a synchronic snapshot of contemporary Japanese religion in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (as seen through the viewfinder of *manga* and *anime*) while also providing a diachronic narrative of the development of religious *manga* culture over time. In other words, like the media it treats, this study has attempted to situate a static image (that of contemporary Japanese religion and its relationship to fictional illustrated entertainment media) within a larger narrative flow that gives an indication of movement, from its medieval precursors all the way to—through the imaginative process of closure—its potential future iterations or manifestations.

NOTES

[1] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), ix.

APPENDIX I: COMPENDIUM OF RELIGIOUS *MANGA* AND *ANIME*

As I have spent most of the past thee years working on a study of religion and its relationship to the Japanese popular culture media of *manga* and *anime*, increasingly scholars in the field have asked for input on how to either utilize these media in the service of teaching about Japanese religions or how to counteract what they perceive as the deleterious effects *manga* and *anime* are having on people's understandings of Japanese religions (within and outside of Japan). My research thus far suggests that the vast majority of *manga* and *anime* have little inherent pedagogical value for teaching about Japanese religions per se, but that with adequate preparation they can be used to teach isolated lessons about contemporary Japanese religiosity or about Japanese religious history. Below I present some of the pitfalls and possibilities that might inhere in such a project.

OVERVIEW

Japanese audiences generally watch televised or movie *anime* after being initially attracted to the narrative through the *manga*. For North American audiences, however, the pattern is often reversed—most fans of *manga* and *anime* culture are attracted to the stories through *anime* first. Recently, however, this has been changing with the proliferation of Internet-based "scanlations" where amateur (and often unauthorized) translators create translations of the *manga* works they find appealing (unauthorized "fansubs" of *anime* have been distributed via the Internet for years). American companies are increasingly recognizing the appeal that *manga* hold and are arranging for their official (legal) translation into English. Still, in North America consumers tend to

focus on *anime* first, and while nearly all *anime* are based upon *manga*, most of the *manga* series on which they are based are rather long. This means that *anime* tend to grossly oversimplify the narratives found in *manga* themselves.

With a few exceptions, there are very few quality secondary sources specifically on *manga* culture and religion. Scholars who specialize in *manga* and *anime* culture tend to refer to religion obliquely but not directly, so their works are of little help in teaching about Japanese religions *through* these media. Studies of Japanese religion and how it relates to *manga* and *anime* still reflect the basic problem that goes along with teaching about Japanese religion in general—finding quality information in translation is difficult. Scholars of religion are beginning to write about these connections, but to my knowledge there has yet to be a book manuscript on the subject; this work is probably the longest piece on the subject to date.

It is certainly true that the closer to explicit lessons on religious doctrine these products become, the more sententious—and therefore boring—they appear to audiences. This is why the *manga* and *anime* that have been produced for proselytization by many established religious groups seem to have been largely unsuccessful. It should be noted, however, that this has not discouraged religions' production of the media. Since it has started publishing *manga*, Kôfuku no Kagaku has devoted nearly twenty percent of its massive publication share to the medium. Many other religious groups have similarly devoted a great deal of energy to producing *manga* and *anime*. Because they have difficulty making their storylines interesting to lay audiences, however, it seems highly unlikely that many of these products will be translated for non-Japanese audiences unless the religions themselves foot the bill and manage to market them persuasively. This also

means, of course, that scholars should not hold their collective breath waiting for the emergence of a *manga* that is an ideal Japanese religions textbook. On the other hand, I would argue that excerpts from certain *manga*, properly contextualized, would make excellent lessons on Japanese religion, provided the translation was of decent quality.

Some students in Japanese religions classes will no doubt want to do research projects on popular pieces that have already been translated and that clearly draw upon religious themes (even if the products avoid pedantic doctrinal discussions). These include works like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* [*Shinseiki ebuangerion* 『新世紀エヴァンゲリオン』] (which uses Kabbalistic and apocalyptic themes) or *Shaman King* [*Shaaman Kingu* 『シャーマンキング』]. I argue that the only way to really utilize these kinds of works in the classroom is to talk about how they are being used *religiously* by audiences: authors' decisions to include exotic religious information in their works is often more about utilizing religious imagery for aesthetic purposes than it is about transmitting a specific message or inculcating belief (I admit that there are some *rare* exceptions). This raises an obvious problem—students who have limited access to Japanese informants may not be able to determine how audiences might utilize these media in a religious or ritual fashion. They may also not recognize the exoticization of cultures foreign to Japan that often accompanies authors' usage of religious themes in *manga* and *anime* (as in the case of authors' frequent usage of the biblical Book of Revelation, for example). There is, however, a growing body of scholarly literature on *manga* and *anime* in general, and readers may consider visiting the Online Bibliography

of Anime and Manga Research (http://corneredangel.com/amwess/) to see the wide variety of scholarly publications on the topic.[1]

There are really very few *manga* or *anime* that could be said to have pedagogical value if one wants to teach about *religions* per se. The preceding chapters have highlighted works that I feel might be useful—with sufficient contextualization—in the Japanese religious studies classroom. Other possibilities do exist, and here I point readers to the annotated bibliography of *manga* and *anime* that deal with religious themes below. It is suggestive, but is not exhaustive by any means. Most of the *manga* were ones that I found merely by browsing the shelves of used bookstores in Tokyo, although some were recommended to me. The easiest criterion for selecting the products was the usage of religious vocabulary in the title (and the amount of *manga* with such vocabulary in their titles is staggering), but other criteria (e.g., religious imagery on the cover, works by authors known to have written on religious themes) played a role as well. The vast majority of the works listed below utilize religious vocabulary in a casual fashion without attempting to inculcate belief, but some of them seem to have elicited—intentionally or not—religious responses in their audiences.

MANGA AND *ANIME* BY TITLE

(Title, Author, Publication Information, Type, Commentary)

666 Satan 『666サタン』 [*Satan: The Number of Beast 666*], vols. 1—10. KISIMOTO Seishi 岸本聖史 (Tokyo: Gangan Comics, Square Enix, 2002). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga***. Artifacts left by an earlier hyperindustrial civilization with extraordinary powers are prized possessions in a post-apocalyptic world. A

young treasure hunter, Ruby, teams up with a mysterious bodyguard named Jio. The series draws upon vocabulary from the biblical Book of Revelation.

Aa, megamisama! 『ああ、女神様！』 [*Ah! My Goddess!*], vols. 1—4. Fujishima Kôsuke 藤島康介 (Tokyo: Afternoon Comics, Kôdansha, 1991). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A goddess suddenly appears before a young man and offers him one wish. Without thinking, he asks for a woman like her to be around him all the time. The goddess, Belldandy, immediately becomes magically attached to him and the two gradually grow closer together while also having a series of adventures with other supernatural beings. Meanwhile, Belldandy's miraculous abilities, while having limits, help the protagonist through any number of mundane problems.

Adobento 『アドベント』 [*Advent*], vols. 1—2. Harao Yumiko 原尾有美子. (Tokyo: Sunday GX Comics, 2004). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** Quiet and reserved Matsuho sees a strange mechanical kami, the first of many ominous signs that something devastating is about to occur. The story works its way inexorably towards an apocalyptic confrontation between powers of good and evil. The cover says (in English): "This is the grand pageant of destruction, confusion, and regeneration."

Akai hato (Apiru) 『赤い鳩—アピル』 [*Red Dove*], vols. 1—2. KOIKE Kazuo 小池一夫 and IKEGAMI Ryôichi 池上遼一 (Big Comics, Shôgakukan, 1988). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A westerner searches for the lost connection between the Jews and the Japanese in premodern Japan. The *manga* builds upon the

popularity of theories about connections between the Jews and the Japanese. Books on the subject can often be found in the "*seishin sekai*" [精神世界, spiritual world] section of bookstores.

Akira 『アキラ』 [*Akira*], vols. 1—6. Ôtomo Katsuhiro 大友克弘 (Tokyo: Young Comics, Kôdansha, 1984—1993). **Emotive *Manga/Anime*, Canonical *Manga*.** A post-apocalyptic tale about the incredible psychic powers unleashed through scientific experiment and the impending destruction of life. Critical of the limits of science, the piece explores the realm of supernatural powers while offering a trenchant anti-war narrative. Within the story, a new religion (*shinshûkyô* 新宗教) helps to preserve order in the chaos of an utterly destroyed Tokyo, temporarily subduing the telekinetic powers of the berserk teen Tetsuo. Tetsuo's eventual apotheosis occurs in a moment of realization that all things are intimately, spiritually connected. As is the case with many *manga* that have been animated, the story in the *anime* version of *Akira* is highly simplified to the point of being difficult to understand in many places. However, the *anime* was highly popular overseas, forming one of the first inroads for the genre among American and European audiences.

Ankoku shinwa 『暗黒神話』 [*Dark Myth*]. Morohoshi Daijirô 諸星大二郎 (Tokyo: Shûeisha Bunko, 1996). **Occult *Manga*.** A young boy finds himself caught up in an ancient drama involving Japanese deities and the humans who would use them for their worldly ends.

Aragamihime 『現神姫』 [*Divine Princess Incarnate*]. AMANO SAKUYA 天乃咲耶 (G Fantasy Comics, Square Enix, 2003). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A young girl in contemporary Japan is the reincarnation of a young man who entered into a pact with a demon during the Warring States period. After a run-in with another youth, her memories from her previous life begin to return.

Asagiri no miko 『朝霧の巫女』 [*Shrine Maiden of the Morning Mist*]. UGAWA Hiroki 宇河弘樹 (Tokyo: Young King Comics, Shônen Manpôsha, 2001). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A young boy moves to a shrine overseen by generations of women, and soon after is assaulted by a mysterious entity. The *manga* is loosely based on the *Inô mononoke roku.*

Basutaado 『バスタード』 [*Bastard!!*], vol. 1. HAGIWARA Kazushi 萩原一至 (Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1988). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** Subtitled "*Ankoku no hakaishin*" 暗黒の破壊神 [Dark Deity of Destruction].

Biriibaazu 『ビリーバーズ』 [*Believers*], vols. 1—2. YAMAMOTO Naoki 山本直樹 (Big Spirits Comics Special, Kôdansha, 2000). **Polemical *Manga* About Religion.** A group of three young people manages a base on a small, otherwise deserted island, stockpiling supplies for the religious group to which they belong. In the course of their daily meditation practices, they struggle with their vows of celibacy and the strength of their anti-secular rejection of consumerist society. Gradually they succumb to their libidos while also dealing with the fact that they have murdered a few people who have intruded upon their island. Plagued with hallucinations, and in doubt about the teachings of their group in light of their

passion for one another, they gradually begin to secede from it, too, into a world of their own. When a final confrontation occurs between the mainland authorities and their group, they confront the choice of violent conflict with the authorities or participation in mass suicide. The final scenes, in which one of the young people finds himself in a prison cell, show that his conception of reality has been significantly altered. Unable to distinguish between hallucination and reality, he allows himself to sink into his own private world of memory, reminiscing about the young woman whom he had loved on their private island.

Buriichi 『ブリーチ』 [*Bleach*], vols. 1—2. KUBO TITE 久保帯人. (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 2002). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, Occult *Manga*.** Teenaged Ichigo has the unusual ability to see spirits and ghosts. After an exchange with a "God of Death" [*shinigami* 死神], Ichigo takes on her role in dispatching souls to the afterlife in a universe populated with all kinds of spirits.

Budda 『ブッダ』 [*Buddha*], vols. 1—12. TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫 (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 1992—1993). **Emotive *Manga*, Canonized *Manga*.** Published by the Ushio Press, which is affiliated with Sôka Gakkai, *Budda* is a hagiography of the historical Buddha embellished with many fictional characters. Overlapping to a certain degree with *Hi no tori* 『火の鳥』 [*Phoenix*], *Budda* explores the concepts of reincarnation and karma, with particular emphasis on the notion of instant enlightenment, enlightenment in this very body (*sokushin jôbutsu* 即身成仏), and original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚). Additionally, Tezuka's Buddha's teaching stems from his deep aversion to social injustice, and the

inability of some of his closest disciples to dispel their avarice underscores the notion that modern Buddhism is fallen or corrupt. Overall, *Budda* fictionalizes Siddhartha's life while implicitly suggesting that its presentation of Buddha's teaching and enlightenment is doctrinally, if not historically, accurate.

Butsuzôn 『仏ゾーン』 [*Buddha-zone*], vols. 1—3. TAKEI Hiroyuki 武井弘之. Jump Comics, Shûeisha. **Religious Vocabulary *Manga***. The title page says, "When you see a Buddhist statue, think hero!" Senju, an avatar of Kannon 観音 [Skt. Avalokitesvara], is dispatched to earth to look after Miroku 弥勒 [Skt. Maitreya] by "the king of the Buddhas," Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 [Skt. Mahavairocana]. Miroku is on earth living as a normal human, and Senju is to protect humans from injustice while guiding Miroku towards enlightenment. Cancelled by the publisher after only three volumes, *Butsuzôn* reflects Takei's inability to create a comprehensive work out of the vast amount of information about Buddhism. Takei, who also wrote the longer series *Shaman Kingu* 『シャーマンキング』 [*Shaman King*], seems unable to stay away from occult themes, even drawing in characters from the longer-running and more popular series. Still, *Butsuzôn* apparently had a committed fan base, and more than one thousand people petitioned for the *manga* to be continued.

Desunôto 『デスノート』 [*Deathnote*], vols. 1—12. OHBA Tsugumi 大場つぐみ and OBATA Takeshi 小畑健 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 2004—2006). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, *Manga* about Religion**. A god of death

[*shinigami* 死神] leaves a notebook in the phenomenal world that spells death for anyone whose name is written therein. The incredibly intelligent and good-looking teenager who finds it, Light, decides to use the notebook to rectify the world's ills, acting upon his extremely strong sense of justice. At the same time, as people come closer to discovering his identity, he finds it necessary to kill even innocent people who might stand in the way of his mission. His nemesis, known only as "L," is an awkward but similarly brilliant teenaged detective who quickly determines that Light may be the killer. At the same time, the two become friends after a fashion. Although the *manga* series clearly plays upon a number of clichéd themes (brilliant teen detectives, supernatural powers), its explorations into the ethics of determining right and wrong and passing judgment are to be extolled. Additionally, the "cult" of followers who come to love Kira [Killer], as Light is known to the public, allows the authors to play upon ideas related to murder in the name of justice. Through his manipulation of public opinion through the capital punishment of criminals and evildoers, Light (as Kira) achieves a sort of pseudo-apotheosis. However, the power to command life and death comes with its own price.

Di gureiman [*D. Gray Man*], vols. 1—2. HOSHINO Katsura 星野桂 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 2004). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga.*** A young man with a grotesque hand imprinted with a cross has been appointed by God to protect "Innocence," a mysterious substance with divine properties, which is being stolen from humans by the evil "Millennial Count." Replete with Christian themes, this

manga draws liberally from a combination of sources to follow protagonist Aren's adventures fighting increasingly challenging demons created by the Millennial Count.

Ga-rei 『喰霊』 [*Spirit-Eater: The Enchained Spiritual Beast*], vol. 1. SEGAWA Hajime 瀬川はじめ (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comics A, Kadokawa Shoten, 2006). **Occult *Manga***. High school student Niimura Kensuke is the only person he knows who can see ghosts, so he is surprised when he runs into Tsuchimiya Kagura, a high school girl whose body harbors a spirit whose job it is to dispatch evil spirits. She becomes his key into explorations of the boundaries between the phenomenal and the spiritual worlds.

Garden, FURUYA Usumaru 古屋兎丸 (Cue Comics, East Press, 2000). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga***. Replete with Christian imagery and vocabulary, *Garden* is also highly irreverent in its usage of the same. Eden, the immaculate conception, and alchemy are all themes. Each chapter seems unrelated to the next, although they do have some general thematic similarities. One example is "*Kamisama no felachio* [*God's Fellatio*]," wherein a beautiful young woman attempts to seduce a nervous virginal acquaintance. Just as they are about to have sex, cherubs swoop down from heaven and orally pleasure the hapless boy. The girl tries as hard as possible to resist, but ultimately has to resign herself to her fate as the mother of God's child. The last scene shows her walking down a Japanese shopping street called "Bethlehem Lane." Delightfully irreverent, the *manga* also deals with

some very disturbing scenes of non-consensual sex and thus leaves a somewhat bitter aftertaste.

Goddo Hando 『ゴッドハンド』 [*God Hand*], NÔJÔ Jun'ichi 能條純一 (Big Spirits Comics Superior, Kôdansha, 1990—1991). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, Religiously Nationalistic *Manga*.** A high school student's right hand has divine powers, both destructive and healing. The story leaves a lot of room for interpretation, most notably in its deployment of Adolf Hitler and swastika imagery in a fashion that seems adulatory.

Godsider Second 『ゴッドサイダーセカンド』 [*Godsider Second*], vol. 1. MAKI Kôji 巻来功士 (Tokyo: Bunch Comics, 2004). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** This *manga* draws liberally on the biblical Book of Revelation in the service of a story about the battles between angels and demons. The inner jacket of the first volume says, "At the end of the Edo period ghost and ghoul stories were apparently exceptionally popular. Therefore, today in this time at the end of postwar civilization, delving into a story of gods and demons might be one small point of interest..."

Habatake! Herumesu enzeruzu 『はばたけ！ヘルメスエンゼルズ』 [Fly! Hermes' Angels]. NANBARABAN (Tokyo: Comic Angels, IRH Publishing Corporation, 2005). **Institutional *Manga*.** Pedagogical *manga* from Kôfuku no Kagaku aimed towards a young audience.

Hagane no renkinjutsushi 『鋼の錬金術師』 [*Full Metal Alchemist*], vols. 1—2. ARAKAWA Hiromu 荒川弘 (Tokyo: Gangan Comics, Square Enix, 2002).

Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, Occult *Manga*. Two brothers try to use alchemy to revive their deceased mother, but when their experiment fails the elder loses a leg, and further sacrifices his right arm to save his younger brother by placing his soul in a suit of armor. The two set out on a mission to find a special stone that will allow them to return their bodies to their former nature, using their alchemical powers along the way to battle against increasingly difficult foes.

Heisei tanuki gassen ponpoko 『平成狸合戦ポンポコ』 [*Heisei Era Tanuki War Ponpoko*], TAKAHATA Isao 高畑勲. Studio Ghibli Production, 1994. **Religious Vocabulary *Anime*, Emotive *Anime*.** A group of *tanuki* (raccoon-dogs) band together to fight against humans' encroachment on their beloved mountain, which is being bulldozed in preparation for a new housing development on the outskirts of Tokyo. Through a variety of thaumaturgical feats, they manage to disturb but not stop the progress of development. Eventually they stage a massive demonstration of magical power, but even this is not enough to stop the building. Faced with no real alternatives, they must eventually decide to blend into human society using their shape-shifting ability, or to make a living as stray animals in the city. Clearly a condemnation of urban development and a call for environmental awareness, the movie also seems to be an allegorical commentary on the ultimate futility of the actions of the political left in front of the juggernaut of late capitalism and political apathy.

Hi izuru tokoro no tenshi 日出処の天子 [*Prince of the Place of the Rising Sun*], vols. 1—7. YAMAGISHI Ryôko 山岸涼子 (Tokyo: Hakusensha Bunko, 1994).

Religious Vocabulary *Manga*. This piece is an irreverent depiction of Shôtoku Taishi, the alleged founder of Japanese Buddhism. Yamagishi paints the young prince as a cross-dressing and powerful leader with fearsome supernatural powers. Although fictional, excerpts from this *manga* might make some interesting lessons for courses on early Japanese Buddhism. The story is told from the perspective of Soga no Umako's son.

Hi no tori 『火の鳥』 [*Phoenix*], vols. 1—13. TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 1992). **Emotive, Canonized *Manga*.** A masterpiece spanning millennia, *Hi no tori* utilizes the human quest for immortality to present a compound philosophical and cosmological picture of the interconnectedness of organisms, the cycle of karmic cause and effect, a cyclical view of history, and skepticism towards religious institutions tempered by a powerfully religious take on life. These themes, shown in the pursuit of a magical bird whose blood brings immortal life to those who drink it, occur in stories that leapfrog from antiquity to the far future, explain the origins of certain elements of Japanese culture, and deploy variations on the same characters time and again. Both Shinto and Buddhist religious and political structures are analyzed as well, so that the mythological accounts of the *Kojiki* overlap with archaeological speculation about the origin of ancient burial mounds [*kofun* 古墳]; the *ritsuryô* 律令 political system and the attendant identification of Buddhism with political control is criticized while Buddhist philosophy (particularly doctrines regarding the interconnectedness of life) is promoted.

Hikaru no go 『ヒカルの碁』 [*Hikaru's* Go], vol. 1. HOTTA Yumi ほったゆみ and OBATA Takeshi 小畑健. (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1999). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga.*** A young boy is possessed by the vengeful spirit of a Heian period *go* master, and with her guidance becomes an increasingly powerful *go* player.

Inugami 『犬神』 [*Dog Kami*], vols. 1—10. HAGAZONO Masaya 外薗昌也 (Tokyo: Afternoon Comics, Kôdansha 1997—2000). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, Occult *Manga*.** A high school student finds a stray dog with extraordinary powers. The dog is the focus of a hunt by multiple interest groups, including a religious leader and medical researchers. The story of the dog's name, "23," is linked to the occult writings of Alistair Crowley. Meanwhile, Shinto imagery, particularly that of the *torii* 鳥居 sacred arch, appears throughout the work. Eventually heading towards an apocalyptic climax, the supernatural powers of a young girl, the descendant of a long line of Shinto priests, helps to achieve reconciliation and to save the world. Significantly, the author mentions that he introduced the religious imagery knowing that it was a crucial element of making successful *seishônen manga.*

Inuyasha 『犬夜叉』 [*Inuyasha*], vols. 1—15. Takahashi Rumiko 高橋留美子 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1997). **Religious Vocabulary Manga/Anime.** An extremely popular series revolving around the "Jewel of Four Souls" and the modern-day young girl who finds herself in immediate danger after falling

through a well beneath her house (a Shinto shrine). The series makes liberal use of terminology related to Shinto in particular.

Jôbutsu shimashô 『成仏しませう』 [*Let Us Die*], OKUDA Kazuto 岡田和人 (Tokyo: Baaz Comics [BC], 2000). **Occult *Manga***. A series of stories about a mysterious fortuneteller who fulfills peoples' dreams, but always at a price.

Kami no hidarite akuma no migite 『神の左手悪魔の右手』 [*The Left Hand of God, the Right Hand of the Devil*], vol. 1. UMEZU Kazuo 楳図かずお (Tokyo: Shôgakukan Bunko, 1997). **Occult Manga**. A *manga* that traces the horrific adventures of a young boy who is both accursed and blessed.

Kamisama no tsukurikata 『神様の作り方』 [*The Making of a Deity*], vol. 1. TAKADA Shinichirô 高田慎一郎 (Tokyo: GFC, Enix, 1996). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga***. A young kami, living in a world populated only by female spirits, decides to descend to the phenomenal world in order to see men. She encounters trouble as soon as she arrives, thus beginning her adventures.

Kamiyadori 『カミヤドリ』 [*Kamiyadori*], vol. 1. SANBE Kei 三部けい (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comics, Kadokawa Shoten, 2004). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*/Occult *Manga***. The story of an elite corps of people who protect innocents from being turned into vessels for malevolent and contagious spirits.

Karisuma カリスマ [Charisma], vols. 1—4. SHINDÔ Fuyuki 新堂冬樹, YASHIOJI Tsutomu 八潮路つとむ and NISHIZAKI Taisei 西崎泰正 (Tokyo: Futaba Press, serialized in *Action!* magazine from May 2004—2006). **Polemical *Manga***

About Religion. The story of a cult leader and his various nefarious activities, including brainwashing, murder, sexual exploitation of his followers, extortion, and hypocrisy regarding the asceticism he preaches. The violent and sexual scenes are particularly graphic, underscoring the image of cults as dangerous groups and of their members as good people who have been deceived by an evil leader.

Kaze no tani no Naushika 『風の谷のナウシカ』 [*Naushika of the Valley of the Wind*], vols. 1—7. MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿 (Nibariki, Tokuma Shoten, 1982—1995, serialized in *Animage* magazine from February 1982—March 1994). **Emotive *Manga/Anime***. A young woman struggles to reconcile warring human nations, humans and nature in a post-apocalyptic world made poisonous by a previous industrial civilization and wasted by the "Seven Days of Fire" which was caused by the massive "*kyoshinhei* 巨神兵 [Giant God Warriors]." As a protagonist, Naushika combines elements of princess, scientist, and messiah, equipped with superhuman compassion and telepathic abilities. She manages to stave off a second apocalypse through her powers of persuasion and compassion, and her actions underscore a message of pacifism, environmental protection, and the fundamental interconnectedness of all organisms.

Kirihito sanka 『桐人讃歌』 [*Eulogy to Kirihito*], vols. 1—3. TEZUKA Osamu 手塚治虫 (Tokyo: Shôgakukan Bunko, 1994). **Emotive *Manga***. Tezuka relates the story of a brilliant young doctor who is horribly disfigured by a disease and persecuted, suffering additionally due to colleagues' and superiors' attempts to

advance their careers. Kirihito takes to healing the needy and unfortunate while quietly trying to prove that his theories regarding the mysterious disease had been right all along. Tezuka delicately but obviously equates Kirihito with a Christ figure.

Kujakuô 『孔雀王』 [*Peacock King*], vols. 1—11. OGINO Makoto 荻野真 (Tokyo: Shûeisha Bunko, 1997). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, Emotive *Manga*.** A young Shingon priest battles increasingly powerful demons (and occasionally other thaumaturges) and performs exorcisms. Apparently this *manga* and the *anime* that followed it prompted some laypeople to seek the tonsure in the Shingon denomination.

Kureta-kun 『クレタくん』 [*Kureta-kun*]. NANBARABAN (Tokyo: Kôfuku no Kagaku Press, 2002). **Institutional *Manga*.** Pedagogical *manga* produced by Kôfuku no Kagaku for a young audience.

Kurogami 『黒神』 [*Black Deity*], vols. 1—2. LIM Dall Young 林達永 and PARK Sung Woo 朴晟佑 (Tokyo: Young Gangan Comics, Square Enix, 2005). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A *kami* named Kuro who has the appearance of a young girl and a healthy dose of naivete regarding the human world finds herself lost in Tokyo. She is magically bound to a young man who helped to save her during a battle with an evil *kami*. The story progresses as she develops increasingly stronger powers in order to fight to protect the "balance of coexistence." Although written by two Koreans, the story utilizes Japanese religious imagery and vocabulary, particularly that of Shinto.

Minzoku gakusha Yakumo Itsuki 『民俗学者八雲樹』 [*Yakumo Itsuki, Scholar of Folklore*], vol. 1. KANARI Yôzaburou 金成陽三郎 and YAMAGUCHI Masakazu 山口譲司 (Tokyo: Young Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 2002). **Religious Studies *Manga*, Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A mystery series in which the protagonist's knowledge of folklore helps him to solve crimes. In the back of each volume is a brief explanation of the folklore that is mentioned in the story.

Mononoke hime 『もののけ姫』 [*Princess Mononoke*], MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿. **Emotive *Anime*.** Set in a fictionalized rendition of the Muromachi era, where *kami* and humans interact directly with one another, this story emphasizes Miyazaki's pet theme of environmental protection while refusing to simplify the story into a tale of good versus evil. Significantly, figures associated with formal religion, most notably the monk Jikô, are portrayed as avaricious; on the other hand, the protagonist Ashitaka, a member of the Emishi indigenous people, is the epitome of a person with the proper respect for life and for *kami*.

Nanbaa faivu 『吾』 [*Number Five*], vols. 1—4. MATSUMOTO Taiyô 松本大洋 (Tokyo: Ikki Comix, Shôgakukan, 2006). **Emotive *Manga*.** The bookstore where I bought this *manga* displayed a card underneath it that said, "This might be close to worship!" Matsumoto's work, while hardly transparent, tends to have references to mystical or sublime experience. One particular theme found in this series is an intangible, non-linguistic bond between characters.

Nijû seiki shônen 『20世紀少年』 [*Twentieth Century Boys*], URASAWA Naoki 浦沢直樹. Serialized from 1999 to 2007 in Big Comics *Spirits* magazine, Kôdansha.

Emotive/Mythical *Manga*, *Manga* About Religion. One of the most complex *manga* recently published, this series focuses on the development of a cultic terrorist organization bent on refashioning the world in its image. Intriguingly, although the work seems highly critical of cults and blind faith, it implicitly positively promotes supernatural powers, exceptional charisma, and justifies the use of violence for the sake of justice. The protagonists, fighting against the cult organization, rely on telekinesis, prophecy, and reincarnation as well as terrorist acts to accomplish their aims. The final two volumes are called *Twenty-first Century Boys*.

Onmyôji 『陰陽師』 [*Yin-yang Diviner*], vols. 1—12. OKANO Reiko 岡野玲子 and YUMEMAKURA Baku 夢枕獏 (Tokyo: Jets Comics, Hakusensha, 1999). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** The story of Abe no Seimei, a famous yin-yang divination practitioner. The popularity of the *manga*, along with the book upon which it is based and the live-action movie that followed, seems to have led to a rise in the popularity of Seimei Shrine.[2]

Raika 『雷火』 [*Raika*], vol. 1. FUJIWARA Kamui 藤原カムイ and TERASHIMA Yû 寺島優 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comics A, Kadokawa Shoten, 2000). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A story of the development of Yamatai, the mythical kingdom of the famed shamaness Himiko.

Rg Veda 『聖伝・Rg Veda』 [*Rg Veda*], vol. 1. CLAMP (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 2003). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*.** A reworking of the popular South Asian myth.

Sazan aizu 『サザンアイズ』 [*3X3 Eyes*], vols 1—3. TAKADA Yûzô 高田裕三 (Tokyo: Young Manga, Kôdansha, 1988—1989). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga*, Occult *Manga*.** A young boy finds himself in charge of a supernatural being, and tries to help her become human. Throughout the story scientific and secular methods for dealing with the various spirits who appear are implicitly criticized, while Tibetan, Chinese, and other traditions' deities and traditions are deployed liberally in service of a story that ultimately depicts battles with increasingly powerful demons and deities.

Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi 『千と千尋の神隠し』 [*Spirited Away*], MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿. **Emotive *Anime*.** A young girl finds herself in a spirit world where her parents have been magically turned into pigs. While trying to discover a way to save her parents, she must adjust to life in the new world, which is populated by a host of *kami* drawn largely from Japanese folklore. Chihiro/Sen's encounters with the *kaonashi* [No-Face] emphasize the moral virtues of honesty and humility, while the *kaonashi* represents greed based upon an empty sense of self. Furthermore, Miyazaki's enduring theme of environmental protection works its way into the film through the stories of two river spirits, both of whom are struggling because their waters have been either polluted or their beds concreted over by humans in the physical world. Chihiro/Sen is able to save both deities through her compassion and a kind of "spiritual love," and is also eventually able to restore her parents to their original state.

Senjutsu chôkôkaku orion 『仙術超攻殻オリオン』 [*Orion*]. SHIROW Masamune 士郎正宗 (Tokyo: Seishinsha, 1991). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga.*** Shirow blends pseudoscientific terminology with jargon from various Asian religious traditions in this adventure story.

Sensôron 『戦争論』 [*On War*], KOBAYASHI Yoshinori 小林よしのり (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 1995). **Nationalistic/Anti-secular *Manga.*** Kobayashi's manifesto on Japan's role in the wars in Asia and the Pacific, this *manga* includes the artist's defense of Japanese imperialism and militarism.

Serial Experiments: Lain Nakamura Ryutarô, dir. **Religious Vocabulary *Anime.*** Teenaged Lain receives a disturbing message from a classmate who has committed suicide. Her attempts to figure out the mystery lead her into deepening interactions with and in the Wired, a communications network that blankets the earth. Lain comes to realize that she can control reality through her psychic link with the Wired, and she becomes a goddess through the power of the technology.

Shaman Kingu 『シャーマンキング』 [*Shaman King*], vols. 1—2 Takei Hiroyuki 武井宏之 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 1998). **Occult *Manga*.** Oyamada Manta is surprised when a young shaman, Asakura Yô, joins his class at school. Asakura's ability to communicate with the spirits of the deceased leads them to increasingly challenging adventures.

Shinazu no Agito 『不死者あぎと』 [*Agito Immortal*], vol. 1. NARUSHIMA Yuri なるしまゆり. (Tokyo: Young Jump Comics Ultra, Shûeisha, 2000). **Occult *Manga.***

A violent death at a Catholic girls' school leads to the dispatch of exorcists to determine if the murder was really the work of the devil.

Shinpika retsuden 『神秘家列伝』 [*Biographies of Mystics*], vol. 1. MIZUKI Shigeru 水木しげる (Tokyo: Kadokawa Sofia Bunko, 2004). **Manga About Religion.** This *manga* is series of hagiographies about various mystics worldwide, including Swedenborg, Milarepa, and Myôe. The stories are presented by Nezumi Otoko [Rat Man], a character from Mizuki's acclaimed series *Ge ge ge no Kitarô* 『ゲゲゲの鬼太郎』 [*Creepy Kitarô*].

Shinran 『親鸞』 [*Shinran*], vol. 1. BARON Yoshimoto バロン吉元 and YAMAORI Tetsuo 山折哲夫 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comikkusu, 1990). **Institutional *Manga*.** A hagiography of the medieval Buddhist leader and founder of Jôdo Shinshû, authored by scholar Yamaori Tetsuo and drawn by Baron Yoshimoto.

Shinseiki evangerion 『新世紀エヴァンゲリオン』 [*Neon Genesis Evangelion*], vols. 1—11. GAINAX, SADAMOTO Yoshiyuki 貞元義行 (Kadokawa Comics A, Kadokawa Shoten, 1995—2007). **Emotive *Manga/Anime*, Religious Vocabulary and Imagery *Manga/Anime*.** An apocalyptic *manga* and popular *anime* series that deploys Christian, Gnostic, and Kabbalistic vocabulary and imagery in a bleak story of humans' fight against "Angels" (*shito*) through the use of giant mechanical suits. The series ends with the apotheosis of one of the characters in a scene filled with crosses. This series is the epitome of the "cult classic"—its obscure imagery and convoluted storyline have invited detailed

exegesis. The use of obscure religious imagery seems to have been primarily to lend an exotic flavor to the work rather than to transmit any specific message.

Teizokurei deidoriimu 『低俗霊DAYDREAM』 [*Vulgar Spirit Daydream*] [*Vulgar Spirit Daydream*], vols. 1—6. OKUSE Saki 奥瀬サキ and MEGURO Sankichi 目黒三吉 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comics A, Kadokawa Shoten, 2001—2004). **Occult *Manga*.** A teenage girl works as a *kuchiyoseya* 口寄せや [spirit medium] when not working as a dominatrix at an SM club in Tokyo. Her abilities help her to solve mysteries surrounding innocent people's deaths, and her personal daemon protects her in dangerous situations.

Tekkon kincriito 『鉄コン筋クリート』 [*Conferrocrete*], MATSUMOTO Taiyô 松本大洋. **Emotive *Manga/Anime* (Personally Inspiring).** Two street urchins, Shiro and Kuro, battle against the forces of mob bosses and "The Snake" who are bent on taking over their area of the city. Like others of Matsumoto's works, the ineffable bond between the two boys is characterized by references to religion. The younger Shiro in particular often refers to "god" when talking about his relationship with Kuro. Kuro's battles with his inner demons form the climax of the film.

Tenkû no shiro Laputa 『天空の城ラプタ』 [*Laputa, the Castle in the Sky*], MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿. Studio Ghibli Productions. **Religious Vocabulary *Anime*.** A young boy encounters a girl who floats down from the sky, and discovers that she has a magical "levistone" which allows her to float through the air. Sheeta, the girl, is the descendant of a race of people who lived in Laputa, a floating kingdom

in the sky that once controlled all of Earth. Forces at work in the government attempt to capture Sheeta in order to harness the magical (or hyper-technological) powers of Laputa. With Pazu's help, Sheeta is eventually able to destroy Laputa with a divine incantation in favor of having it fall into the wrong hands. Although the religious elements in this movie are minimal compared to other works by Miyazaki, Sheeta's story and her status as a princess with supernatural powers have a parallel to figures like Naushika and San in his other films.

Tokkô: Devil's Awaken 『特公—Devil's Awaken』 [*Special Forces: Devil's Awaken*], vol. 1. FUJISAWA Tôru 藤沢とおる (Afternoon Comics, Kôdansha, 2004). Shindô is a young detective who seeks to solve the mystery of his parents' death. He is always plagued by dreams of a mysterious young sword-wielding woman who has a tendency to appear at violent crime scenes. In the near future Tokyo where Shindô lives, grisly murders are rumored to be the work of devils and demons, and it becomes clear that the mystery woman has decided that Shindô may have a special quality.

Tonari no totoro 『隣のトトロ』 [*My Neighbor Totoro*], MIYAZAKI Hayao 宮崎駿. Studio Ghibli Productions. **Emotive *Anime* (Personally Inspiring).** Two girls adjust to their new home in a pastoral setting near Tokyo. The girls befriend the *totoro*, a benign forest spirit who helps them in various ways. The adults in the story are oblivious to the spirits that Mei and Satsuki can see, overlooking the passage of the speedy *nekobasu* (Catbus, a combination of the Cheshire Cat and a bus, with ten legs). Meanwhile, the images of traditional religion that appear in

the story (*torii* 鳥居, *hokora* 祠, *jizô* 地蔵, *inari* 稲荷, *shimenawa* 七五三縄) are all contrasted with the vibrance and fecundity of the *totoro*. The overall effect is a pastoral nostalgia combined with anti-secularism, a subtle critique of traditional religion, and a focus on connections between humans and nature. The film is regarded as an *anime* classic, and paraphernalia associated with the film are ubiquitous.

Urutorahebun 『ウルトラヘヴン』 [*Ultraheaven*], vols. 1—2. KOIKE Keiichi 小池桂一 (Tokyo: Enterbrain, Beam Comics, 2002—2005). **Occult *Manga*.** In a near-future world where drugs have been fully decriminalized, humanity adjusts its moods through the use of various chemical cocktails. Between highs and drug-induced sleep, people begin to question their existence and some even seek suicide through a final "super high." Featuring near-death experiences as well as overwhelming, intense depictions of hallucinations, the *manga* is, as the store where I purchased it crowed, "an exploration of the world of the spirit [*seishin sekai* 精神世界]!" (Incidentally, the store is apparently one of just a few that will actually carry the *manga*, since it seems to glorify drug use and abuse.) The existential brooding, combined with the wordless depictions of internal landscapes, makes for a dark but compelling read. The second volume shifts the focus from drugs specifically to technologically induced hallucinations and explorations of the psyche. The protagonist, Cabu, and his female friend manage to discover a hidden recording in the machine they are using to psychically link to one another. Having reached the limits of the machine after a shared near-death

experience, the two are invited to join a "Meditation Center" in order to learn how to further manipulate their own—and others'—perceptions of reality. Since the series is still in serialization, it seems that the story will proceed with Cabu's further adventures in discovering the realm of the spirit, the world between life and death, or simply the world of hallucination. The aforementioned Meditation Center demonstrates its powers over the phenomenal world through spoon-bending displays, and it seems that the series may depict Cabu joining the group in order to harness his developing telekinetic powers. Resorting largely to images alone for expression, Koike's incredibly detailed work is delightfully trippy, and its focus on hallucinogenic drugs as a tool for perceiving other dimensions puts it in the realm of the occult.

Y *shi no rinjin: kamisama ga ippai* 『Y氏の隣人—神様がいっぱい』 [*Mr. Y's Neighbors: There are tons of Spirits!*]. YOSHIDA Hiroyuki 吉田ひろゆき. (Tokyo: Jump Comics Remix, Shûeisha, 2004). A series of shorts about demons and spirits who enliven the day to day of ordinary people in a neighborhood.

Yamataika 『ヤマタイカ』 [*Yamataika*], vols. 1—5. HOSHINO Yukinobu 星野之宣. (Tokyo: Ushio Bijuaru Bunko, 1997). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga.*** A semi-mythological science fiction story that attempts to trace the origins of the Japanese people through para-mythological theories combined with the adventure story of the protagonist Miwako, who is deemed a reincarnation of Himiko, who is further associated with Amaterasu (Amamiku). The narrative weaves between Pacific Islander, Okinawan, and Yamato clan mythology and history, uncovering

a previously unknown origin of the Japanese and Japanese mythology. The story tends to get bogged down in long-winded and sometimes tautological explanations of ancient mythology, but reflects the interest in ancient Shinto that became prevalent in the 1980s when it was written. Also, since the entire series was republished in 2007 as *The Legend of Yamataika*, it seems that there is still market demand for such works.

Yasukuniron 『靖国論』 [*On Yasukuni*], KOBAYASHI Yoshinori 小林よしのり (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 2005). **Nationalistic/Anti-secular *Manga.*** A highly conservative contribution to the debate regarding Yasukuni Jinja 靖国神社 and the enshrinement (*gôshi* 合祀) of several Class A war criminals there. Written in 2005, when former prime minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro 小泉純一郎 was insisting on visiting the shrine over the protests of peace activists within Japan and vociferous objections from China and Korea, the work emphasizes the right of the Japanese people to honor their war dead. It furthermore strikes an anti-secularist note by suggesting that those who criticize visits to Yasukuni, by the prime minister or others, have lost sight of the fundamental issues important to Japanese people. Kobayashi also severely criticizes efforts to create a secular war memorial, saying that to do so would be akin to creating a new religious cult (and the fact that the Kômeitô 公明党, the political party affiliated with Buddhist new religion Sôka Gakkai 創価学会, has pushed for the creation of such a memorial should not be overlooked). Kobayashi also uses the opportunity to explain Shinto in populist terms.

Yôkihiden 『妖鬼妃伝』 [*Tale of the Demonic Princess*]. MIUCHI Suzue 美内すずえ (Tokyo: Tokyo: Hakusensha Bunko, 1995). **Occult *Manga***.

Yûyû hakusho 『幽遊白書』 [*Ghost Play White Paper*], vol. 1. TOGASHI Yoshihiro 富樫義博 (Tokyo: Jump Comics, Shûeisha, 2004). **Religious Vocabulary *Manga***. The protagonist dies in the first scene, and the rest of the *manga* follows his adventures in the afterlife and at the boundary of the phenomenal world.

NOTES

[1] The website is maintained by fans for fans, but has a section devoted to peer-reviewed articles, monographs, dissertations, and theses. The sources are primarily in English. Initially accessed 23 March 2008.

[2] Thanks to Carolyn Pang of the National University of Singapore for pointing this out.

APPENDIX II: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

CONDUCTED AT TAMAGAWA GAKUEN UNIVERSITY, TOKYO, JAPAN

20 JUNE 2007

The ethnographic elements of this study comply with the guidelines set forth by the University of Hawai'i; the project received an exemption from the Committee on Human Subject Research. All survey and interview participants were informed of the purposes of the study before participating, and with the exception of *manga* artists, the privacy of all respondents has been protected by the use of pseudonyms in the text. Interviews were taperecorded and I took notes during the sessions that I typed immediately after each interview; most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. The approach to people's information in online fan communities was somewhat different; in these cases I recorded information as a "silent," non-participating observer.

Survey instruments are never perfect, and this one includes a few typos as well as some problems in conceptualization. I have left the typos as-is, but have slightly modified the formatting for consistency with the rest of this document. The emphasis for the preceding chapters was on the third section, which deals with the crossover of attitudes towards *manga* and religion. Significantly, virtually 100 percent of the students said that they did not have a personal faith or belief, although many of them said that their families had some sort of religious affiliation or some kind of religious implement or artifact in their homes. Quite a few responded positively to "religious" concepts or ideas (the existence of gods, spirits, the afterlife, reincarnation, etc.). 88.4% of the respondents also said that they regularly read *manga* or watched *anime*. 36% said definitively that *manga* plays an important role in their lives, while 35% said the same for

anime. 37.2 % stated definitively that *manga* and *anime* can improve the world or otherwise contribute to the cultivation of individuals. Even higher percentages responded to the preceding three statements in a somewhat positive fashion ("Given the choice, I would say so")—41.9% for *manga*, 43% for *anime*, and 38.4% in response to the question about the ability of these media to contribute to improving the world or individuals. Nearly all of the students regularly utilize the Internet, and a majority belongs to social networking services like MIXI. Many students also have their own homepages.

Survey begins on the following page.

宗教意識と漫画文化の関わり
アンケート調査

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このアンケートはジョリオン・バラカ・トーマスの修士論文の取材の一部として行っております。回答は自由（答えたくない質問を飛ばして下さい）。個人情報（名前など）は公にしません。論文にはアンケートの結果が統計の形で使われることになります。どうぞ、ご協力をお願い致します。

個人情報

年齢：

性別：　女性　男性

大学学年：　１年生　２年生　３年生　４年生
５年生　その他

アルバイトをしていますか？　はい　いいえ

暮らしは？　実家　一人暮らし　寮　その他

この調査の回答について、研究者はさらにお訪ねしたかった場合、取材（インタビュー）のお願いしてもよろしいですか？　（インタビューは学問的な目的で行っていて、個人のプライベートな情報を許可されずに一切公にしません。）

はい　いいえ

「はい」の場合、ここにメールアドレスとお名前（ふりがな付き）を記入して下さい：

お名前＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿メール：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

I. 宗教意識

1．あなたの宗教イメージは？（○を付けてください）

宗教はすばらしい　宗教は別に存在してもいい　　宗教は分からない　宗教についてさらに知りたい　　宗教は怖い　宗教を廃棄した方がいい

2．「家の宗教」はありますか？以下の宗教団体から選ぶか、記入して下さい（複数回答可）

仏教　仏教の宗派:　浄土宗　浄土真宗　曹洞宗　臨済宗　日蓮宗　真言宗　天台宗　その他の宗派：（　　）

神道　（教派：　　）

創価学会

立証校正会

世界真光文明教団

崇高真光

幸福の科学

エホヴァの証人

統一教会

キリスト教　（教派：　　）

その他：

３．あなたの家には以下のものがありますか？（複数回答可）

仏壇

神棚

祠（ほこら）

その他の碑

仏像

亡くなった親戚の写真を飾ったもの

その他の宗教的なもの ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

４．宗教活動・宗教的な行為をしていますか？　はい　　いいえ

５．特定の宗教に所属する学校に通ったことがありますか？　はい

いいえ

（「はい」の場合、宗教・宗派を記入して下さい＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿）

６．以下のものを（a.定期的にする　b.たまにする　c.したことがある　d.したことがあるけど、今はしない　e.したことがない　f.知らない　g.興味がない）の中で当てはまる字をつけて下さい。

初詣

お彼岸

お墓参り

神社参拝

靖国神社参拝

おつとめ

読経

お清め

占い

占い師を訪ねる

手かざし

手相

百度参り

巡礼

お寺参り

お祓えに行く

道（茶道、柔道、剣道、合気道など）

教会に行く

ヒーリング

スピコン（スピリチュアリティ・コンベンション）

a.定期的にする b.たまにする c.したことがある d.したことがあるけど、今はしない e.したことがない f.知らない g.興味がない

７．あなたは宗教や信仰を持っていますか？　はい　　いいえ

８．以下のものが存在すると思いますか？　(a, b, c, d, e の中で、一つを付けて下さい　a: 信じる；b: あり得る；c: あまり信じない；d: あり得ない；e: 聞いたことがない)

神様　（多神教的な複数な存在）

神様　（一神教的な存在）

仏

ブッダ

菩薩（ぼさつ）

怨霊

死後の世界

来世

前世

超能力

霊魂

因果応報

浄土

天国

地獄

輪廻転生

魂

幽霊

悪魔

宇宙生命

かみがかり

厄年

テレパシー

金縛り

天使

a: 信じる
b: あり得る
c: あまり信じない
d: あり得ない
e: 聞いたことがない

９．細木数子、江原啓之などの番組を観ていますか？　当てはまるものに○を付けて下さい。

定期的に観ている　たまにみる　あまり観ない　　興味がない　観た事がない

１０。靖国神社についてどう思いますか？（a.そう思う　b.どちらかといえばそう思う　c.どちらかといえばそう思わない　d.そう思わない）の中から当てはまる字を付けて下さい。

皆は参拝すべきだ

参拝する自由をまもるべきだ

別の追悼施設を作るべきだ

首相は参拝すべきだ

別の追悼施設を作ってはいけない

参拝してはいけない

靖国神社は聞いたことがない

１１。オウム真理教（現在、アレーフ）についてどう思いますか？以下の意見に（a.そう思う　b.どちらかといえばそう思う　c.どちらかといえばそう思わない　d.そう思わない）の中から当てはまる字を付けて下さい。

オウムはまだあぶない

オウムの信者は麻原彰晃（松本被告）に騙された

信者は洗脳された

信者は超能力を獲得した

オウムはもう危険ではない

いわゆるエリートはオウムみたいな団体に入りがちだ

いわゆるオタクはオウムみたいな団体に入りがちだ

オウムは聞いたことがない

１２．「宗教」とは何ですか？　以下の選択肢にa. そう思う　b. どちらかといえばそう思う　c.どちらかといえばそう思わない　d.そう思わない

宗教は日本の伝統を保っている

宗教は楽しい

宗教は危ない

宗教は人間の不安や悩みをなくす

宗教は福祉活動をする

宗教はもはや存在意義がない

宗教は人間を救う

宗教は人を騙す

宗教は政治と絡みがちだ

宗教は現在の世界には必要

宗教は弱い人のものだ

宗教はお金のために行われている

宗教は「死」と関係ある

宗教の時代はもう終わった

宗教は神社やお寺のような施設に過ぎない

宗教は「生き方」を教える

宗教は道徳や倫理の基盤である

宗教のせいで世界は危機に瀕している

宗教は暴力や戦争と関係がある

宗教は平和をもたらす

宗教の教えは人類の知恵だ

a. そう思う
b. どちらかといえばそう思う
c.どちらかといえばそう思わない
d.そう思わない

１３．「スピリチュアリティ　（霊性）」とは何ですか？ 以下の選択肢にa. そう思う　b. どちらかといえばそう思う　c.どちらかといえばそう思わない　d.そう思わない

スピリチュアリティは宗教よりいい

スピリチュアリティは曖昧な単語だ

スピリチュアリティは消費された宗教情報だ

スピリチュアリティは現在の世界に必要だ

スピリチュアリティは人類を救う力を持つ

１４。信じるかどうかは別として、あなたの「神」のイメージは何ですか？以下のものから最も近いものを選んで、○を付けて下さい。

宇宙を創造したり支配したりする唯一の存在　いろいろな役割や力を持つ複数の存在　いのちやエネルギーの源になるような存在　　宇宙の法則そのもの　人の心の中にあるもの　　その他　（具体的に　　）　　特定のイメージがわかない

１５。信じるかどうかは別として、あなたの「仏」のイメージは何ですか？一番当てはまるものを選んで、○を付けて下さい。

お釈迦様　　お寺に置かれた色々な仏像　　ご先祖様　　死者　悟った人　その他　（具体的に　　）　　特定のイメージがわかない

１６。信じるかどうかは別として、あなたの「霊魂」のイメージは何ですか？以下のものからあてはまるものを選んで、○を付けて下さい。

生きている人間の中にあるもの　　死んだ人の「念」　動物にある物　樹木や草花にある物　　宇宙全体の存在　　その他（具体的に　　）　　特定のイメージがわかない

１７。宗教に関する次の意見について（a.そう思う　b.どちらかと言えばそう思う　c.どちらかといえばそう思わない　d.そう思わない　　e.分からない）のいずれかの字で答えて下さい。

どんなに科学が進歩しても宗教は人間に必要だ
先祖は自分たちを見守ってくれている
大和魂は存在する
色々な宗教があるけど、結局は同じことを目標にしている

宗教を信じると、心のよりどころができる

霊感・霊視というものはあり得る

義務教育で世界の宗教についての基礎知識を教えるべきだ

宗教がらみの事件が多いので、宗教には警戒している

日本独特の習慣がある

信仰がないけど、宗教に興味がある

一般的に宗教は危ないというイメージがある

特定の宗教団体が特定の政党を支持するのはよくない

宗教的トラブルがあったときに相談出来るような公的な窓口の設置が必要だ

現代人にとって宗教は不必要だ

テロは主に宗教家や宗教団体の仕業だ

政教分離をまもるべきだ

天皇が必要

皇室儀礼は必要

宗教の時代はもう終わっている

現代人にとってスピリチュアリティは大事だ

宗教は人間を救う力を持つ

宗教にこだわらないが、昔の生き方はすばらしい

女系天皇になってはいけない

イスラームに興味がある

学校の卒業式や入学式で「君が代」を斉唱するべきだ

神道に興味がある

宗教は信じないが、神様や仏や霊魂の存在を信じる

古代神道に興味がある

陰陽道に興味がある

憲法九条をまもるべきだ

a.そう思う
b.どちらかと言えばそう思う
c.どちらかといえばそう思わない
d.そう思わない
e.分からない

現代の日本は腐っている

宗教的な行為は習慣に過ぎない

キリスト教に興味がある

宗教家を信頼出来る

天皇の即位儀礼などに公金を使ってはいけない

仏教に興味がある

日本人は特別だ

記紀神話に興味がある

死ぬ時に自然埋葬して欲しい

禁欲はすばらしい

自殺や殺人事件は近年増えて来ている

信仰がなくても、宗教に所属している学校に通ってもいい

宗教があれば、不登校やひきこもりや子ども殺人事件が終わる

a.そう思う
b.どちらかと言えばそう思う
c.どちらかといえばそう思わない
d.そう思わない
e.分からない

II. 漫画・アニメ

1．漫画やアニメは定期的に読んだり・観たりしますか？　はい

　　いいえ

2．どんな漫画・アニメが好きですか？（複数回答可）

スポーツ　メカ　オカルト　レディズ　少女　少年　青年　SF　歴史・時代小説　魔法使い・ファンタジー　推理小説　その他（　　）

3．一番好きな漫画家・アニメ監督は誰ですか？好きな作品は何ですか？

４．あなたの世界観・人生を変えた漫画がありますか？どの漫画でしたか？

５．あなたの世界観・人生を変えたアニメがありますか？どのアニメでしたか？

６．以下の漫画を読んだことがありましたら、〇を付けて下さい

『火の鳥』　『ブッダ』　『２０世紀少年』　『風の谷のナウシカ』
『アキラ』
『ヤマタイカ』　『孔雀王』　『鋼の錬金術師』　『陰陽師』　『ナンバーファイブ』
『鉄コン筋クリート』　『ヒカルの碁』　『新世紀エヴァンゲリオン』
『D。グレイマン』
『仏ゾーン』　『シャマン・キング』　『Bleach』　『低俗霊DAYDREAM』　『親鸞』
『靖国論』　『戦争論』　『デスノート』　『犬夜叉』　『犬神』
『くれたくん』
『桐人讃歌』　『スピリット・ジャンプ』　『滅亡の日』　『バガボンド』
『３X３EYES』　『エースをねらえ！』　『ウルトラヘヴン』　『日出処の天子』　『游游白書』

『神様の作り方』　『Garden』　『God Hand』　『カリスマ』　『ビリーバーズ』

『効殻機動隊　Ghost in the Shell』　『げげげのきたろう』　『Orion』

7．どうして漫画を読みますか？一番当てはまるものに１、やや当てはまるものに２、あまり当てはまらないものに３、全然当てはまらないものに４を付けて下さい。

世界観
現実逃避
純粋なエンターテインメント
本やテレビ飽きるから
勉強するため
電車で何かをしたい
絵がきれい
ストーリーが面白い

8。あなたの人生で、漫画は大切な役割を果たすと思いますか？

そう思う　どちらかといえばそう思う　どちらかといえばそう思わない　そう思わない

9。あなたの人生で、アニメは大切な役割を果たすと思いますか？

そう思う　どちらかといえばそう思う　どちらかといえばそう思わない　そう思わない

１０。漫画やアニメは世界を改善出来る・人の養成に貢献出来ると思いますか？

そう思う　　どちらかといえばそう思う　　どちらかといえばそう思わない
　　そう思わない

１１。インターネットはどの程度使っていますか？当てはまるものに○を付けて下さい。

自分のホームページを持っている
ブロッグを持っている
SNS（MIXIなど）のメンバーである
定期的に使っている
たまに使っている
パソコンは持っていないが、携帯で使っている
あまり使っていない
使わない

１２。以下の意見について、（a.そう思う　b.どちらかといえばそう思う　c.どちらかといえばそう思わない　d.そう思わない）の中から当てはまる字を付けて下さい。

未来は楽しみにしている
今の自分は好き
今の社会事情はいい
昔の社会は現代よりましだった
未来が怖い
歴史に興味がある

人間を信頼出来ない

現代の一大事な問題はテロだ

本当の自分が知らない

現代の一大事な問題は環境問題だ

日本はすばらしい国だ

将来、やりたい仕事に就く自信がある

将来やりたい仕事は決まっている

海外で生活してみたい

今の生活は幸せである

日本の政治に興味がある

趣味がある

外国人の友達がいる

将来社会人になりたい

日本人として生まれて良かった

夢がある

家に引きこもったことがある

ニートが偉い

出来れば昔の日本に住みたい

妊娠中絶してはいけない

フリーターが偉い

毎日の生活はむなしい

毎日の生活は楽しい

いい友達がいる

家族とは親しい

a. そう思う
b. どちらかといえばそう思う
c. どちらかといえばそう思わない
d. そう思わない

III. 総合質問

１．漫画を読み、アニメを観る時に、「超越感をした」、「満たされた感じがした」、「恍惚感を覚えた」あるいは「何かを切実に実感した」、「インスピレーションを覚えた」や「癒される感じがした」ことがありますか？

ある　　（作品名：　　）
ちょっとだけある　　（作品名：　　）
ほとんどない
全然ない

２．宗教団体が漫画・アニメというメディアを通して宣教することはどう思いますか？

いいと思う　どちらかといえばいいと思う　　どちらかといえば悪いと思う
　　してはならないと思う

３．宗教家ではない人が宗教的なテーマ、登場人物、教義をストーリーに編み込むことはどう思いますか？

いいと思う　どちらかといえばいいと思う　　どちらかといえば悪いと思う
　　してはならないと思う

４．漫画を読んで・アニメを観てから宗教に興味を持ったことがありますか？

ある　　（作品名：　　）
ちょっとだけある　　（作品名：　　）
ほとんどない
全然ない

５。漫画を読んで・アニメを観てから特定の神様・仏・教祖・宗教事件について興味を持ったことがありますか？

ある　　（作品名：　　）
ちょっとだけある　　（作品名：　　）
ほとんどない
全然ない

ご協力ありがとうございました。アンケートをジョリオンや永島先生に渡して下さい。

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